

**A QUEST FOR CENTRE
A STUDY IN THE TRAVELOGUES
OF
V.S. NAIPAUL**

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Preface

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul is one of greatest living English writers. There hardly remains a literary award that has not come his way for some time now. In intellectual circles round the world, there has been an expectation that the Nobel Prize for literature would go to him.

V.S. Naipaul is a product of a distinctive combination of circumstances. A Hindu Brahmin born in Trinidad, he is an Indian by origin, a Trinidadian by nativity and a British by residence as well as intellectual training and inclination. Naipaul's tragedy is that he was born in exile, separated from his racial and cultural roots. He was driven into another exile from the land of his birth. A third dispossession awaited him in England. He was really and truly "lost". And then he set out to discover himself and his world through his works. I have attempted to analyse five of his travelogues : *The Middle Passage*, his journey to Trinidad, *An Area of Darkness* and *India - A wounded civilization*, which reveal his attempts to forge a link with the country of his forefathers, *Among the Believers*, in which he visits four Muslim countries where he finds many "lost" individuals like him and *Finding the Centre*, which focusses on his journey to Africa and journey into his past. All these travelogues reveal his intense search for the centre of his being.

During the course of my work, I received love, guidance and co-operation in abundant measure. It is with profound pleasure, that I record my obligations. I owe my special debt of gratitude to Prof. Sheobhushan Shukla of Allahabad University, without whose help my research work would not have been complete. I also express my thanks to the members of my family for their encouragement and patience which has made this research work enjoyable.

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CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

Every country is home to one man and exile to another;

Wrote the famous modern poet T.S. Eliot in one of his poems, To the Indian who died in Africa, but for Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul born and brought up in Trinidad, the problem of defining his mother land is difficult. He faces acute dilemma of “belonging and not belonging”. Though he was born and brought up in Trinidad, he never felt at home over there and Trinidad always remained an exile for him. The search for roots and home took Naipaul to England and India but each time he rejected these countries and still remains a rootless writer.

V.S. Naipaul was born in a Brahmin family in Trinidad in 1932 and he sums up his background as “fairly simple, barbarous and limited.” He found the squalor of Trinidad stifling to his spirit. From early childhood Naipaul had decided to escape from Trinidad because neither the country impressed him nor the Hindu family life : both of them seemed irrelevant and meaningless to Naipaul. Amongst the members of the family he was close to his father Seepersad Naipaul whose life was a record of frustrations and failures and though Naipaul admired his father very much he did not have the desire to meet the same fate of despair like his father. He

very acutely felt the pain of his father and this instilled in him a passionate desire to escape from Trinidad. Naipaul himself recalls in *The Middle Passage* that when he was about twelve years old he wrote a vow on the end paper of his Kennedy's *Revised Latin Prime* to leave Trinidad within five years.

Naipaul felt Trinidad to be just "a dot on the world map" and a purely philistine society, where materialist gains were more relevant. The Caribbean Culture is a mixed one and does not possess its own individuality. Every thing is borrowed in it. Naipaul recalls in *The Middle Passage*

I knew Trinidad to be unimportant, uncreative, cynical....It was a place where the stories were not stories of success but a failure. (*Passage* 44-45)

Naipaul considers Trinidad as a passive place in which the local people had no voice. The foreign empires had maimed them.

A place like Port of Spain in the uncluttered New World has no independent life. It alters with the people, who came to it. (*El Dorado*18)

Trinidad has a very despairing history of its own. It was discovered by Christopher Columbus on his third Voyage of discovery on 31st July 1498. He named the Island La Trinidad because a view of the three peaks of the southern range of mountains reminded him of his Vow to name the next Islands, he sighted in honour of the blessed trinity. The Arawak name for the Island is believed to be

Iere - the land of the humming bird. The Spaniards were the first Europeans to come to these Islands and enslaved or slaughtered the native Indians. After this phase of brutality began a new phase — Negro slavery. The inflow of Negro slaves into the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean began in 1510. Due to excessive torture, these slaves fled and died. Uptil now Spainards had been interested in Trinidad for monetary gains and for them Trinidad was merely the stepping stone in their search for the legendary city of El. Dorado — situated somewhere on the Orinoco River in South America.

Spain did not have men to populate and fortify Trinidad: so they as an alternative invited settlers from neighbouring slave Islands — mostly French planters — and after that the Island remained Spanish only in name and even after British conquest in 1797 retained its French character. When slavery was abolished in 1834 the plantation faced an acute shortage of labour. The emancipated slaves refused to work : so the planters turned their eyes towards India and the first Indian immigrants arrived in Port of Spain on the 30th May 1845 as indentured labourers. Immigration from India ceased in 1917 by which time about 14000 Indians had come to Trinidad and that too mostly from the districts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. These indentured labourers did the work the slaves had done before and also lived in slave barracks. Indian immigrants were called East

Indians to distinguish them from the American Indians and the West Indians.

The Indian immigrants constituted both Hindus and Muslims. Though these people have built temples and mosques for worship, years of alienation from their motherland has brought several changes in their language, culture and religious rituals. Their language is influenced by local language and English. They have lost their individuality and have changed according to conditions prevalent there. All these Indians in spite of their own religion and culture belong to the "New World". They are immigrants and have the restlessness of emigrants.

The Britishers who were responsible for providing bread to the Trinidadians suppressed the voice of the people living in Trinidad and destroyed their individuality. The Britishers wanted to establish the "White Civilisation" but unfortunately this white civilisation was not the civilisation that was prevailing in Europe. It is a form of behaviour represented by third rate white people who have acquired wealth in West Indies in a way in which they could not do in England. Even the education system of Trinidad is affected by this. It is based on the idea that the culture of the whites is superior to that of the immigrants. Education is provided to the natives so that they can be transformed into good servants but not

masters. These immigrants have been turned into “mimic men” by injecting into their veins the feeling that the whites are superior.

The present population of Trinidad consists of people of Amerindian stock and the descendants of the people of three continents — Europe, Africa and Asia — who have made their uneasy home in this Island. Only this confused amalgam of many races remains as witness to the unhappy history of region. In the absence of proper history, composite racial atmosphere Trinidad has retained the feature of a camp life. It is a place insignificant to the Trinidadians. They think it to be an insignificant place having no importance of its own. People are interested more in the world outside : for them life going on in Australia is more important than life going on in neighbour country Venezuela. The Blacks living in Trinidad consider the English culture their ideal: they speak broken English, dress up like Englishmen and have no independent notion of nationalism or pride of race. With regard to the feelings of the blacks, Naipaul has written :

Ours is not a separate civilization, but a part of the great branch of civilization that is called Western civilization. At any rate this is where begins our national life. Our culture is rooted in western culture and our values, in the main are the values of the Christian Hellenic tradition. (*Passage* 72)

The residents of Trinidad have misconceived the western culture and though these people blindly imitate Christianity it does not give them individuality.

Trinidad is always on the brink of racial war because people of different races and culture including natives are living in the Island. Many races thrown together in the Caribbean melting pot have no desire to mingle with one another. All of them want to stay aloof and have become alienated from one another. The Indians who constitute one third of the population of Trinidad have limited their activities within their community but directly or indirectly they are also being affected by the mixed culture of Trinidad and are suffering from a cultural crisis.

V.S. Naipaul's grand parents had also readily joined the bandwagon of the indentured labourers to Trinidad, with some hope of a better job prospect, but the devastating, consequences of it were realized soon by them. They found themselves alienated in a land with strange culture. They were Brahmins of India but social and political systems of the alien land had compelled them to alter their social and the religious rituals. Though financially their status had become elevated but emotionally they felt desperate and rootless. Naipaul's birth place is Trinidad but Naipaul was unable to accept

that country and rejecting it he went to London in search of his roots.

Naipaul left his place of birth to seek better education and he went to England and made an attempt to strike his root there but this time also he failed. England, the land of his colonisers, could not help him in defining his identity, though this second exile was his own personal choice : still his sensitive mind remained restless. He could only become a second class Sahib. He found himself lost in the chaos of urban life. He himself states :

London was not the centre of my world, I have been misled. (*Area* 42)

Naipaul had rejected West Indies in the hope that he would be able to find the centre of his being in England but the West Indian and the East Indian components of his personality make him a perpetual outsider in England. After thirty years of residence in England he says : “Living here has been a kind of castration really” (*Newsweek* 38). Whatever his admiration for the culture, Naipaul has always been clear-eyed about his own fundamental distance from it.

London is my metropolition centre; it is my commercial centre, and yet I know that it is a kind of limbo and that I am a refugee in the sense that I am always peripheral. One’s concerns are not the concerns of local people. (Hammer 41)

In an interview given in 1973 to Ronald Bryden, Naipaul said of London:

It's not a place where I can flourish completely. It does not feed me
(Bryden 370)

Naipaul is unable to write about London life because it does not provide him inspiration for his creative work. He himself has voiced the obsessive fear that his inspiration will dry up, particularly because the place where he has set his home is unable to feed his imagination. He states :

I've been living in England, but really I think it's truer to say that I've been attached to London these few square miles which made an international city, a great metropolis. As soon as I move out of that little enchanted area, I'm in a foreign country in which I'm not terribly interested. (Hammer 40)

It is the search for identity and home which brings Naipaul to India and for the first time in 1962 Naipaul confronts reality. Naipaul had migrated to England to make himself a writer but finds that England does not lend itself to a fantasy of place in his case. He tries to cling on to the fantasy of India for twelve long years. During these years England's potential as a promised land has been undercut by Naipaul's feelings of alienation, isolation and trauma of displacement. Turning to India for solace, Naipaul receives a shock. The

childhood fantasy of India collapses and Naipaul realises that India is not the centre of his being.

Naipaul feels that though Indian, he is unable to relate to his fellow Indians. He says

I was not English nor Indian. I was denied the victories of both
(*Area* 98)

Naipaul's initial response to India's distress was of disillusionment as the India of reality did not square with the image of India that he had carried with him. Naipaul felt humiliated and the humiliation is of a sort which an educated child feels while introducing his illiterate parents. Naipaul feels angry at the present condition of India, the pride which Naipaul felt that he would have in belonging to India was not possible in the present scenario of India and at the same time the continued British presence through buildings, institutions and westernization made him angry. It was like a violation. India's simplicity, its poverty, its submissive attitude and its self-absorption irritates him. He writes

India is old and India continues. But all the disciplines and skills that India now seeks to exercise are borrowed. Even the ideas Indians have of the achievements of their civilizations are essentially the ideas given to them by Europeans scholars in the nineteenth century. India by itself could not have rediscovered or assessed its past....for too long as a conquered people, they have been parasitic on other civilizations.
(*India* 134)

V.S. Naipaul feels that his wandering spirit will find its moorings in India because India is after all a land from where his father's father had been brought to Trinidad as a baby and from where his maternal grandfather had come as an indentured labourer. In spite of his early detachment and religious beliefs, Naipaul could not remain untouched by Hindu attitudes. He grew up surrounded by mementoes of India, for in its artefacts India existed whole in Trinidad. This kept India alive in the mind even if only as a mysterious land of darkness, from which his ancestors had arrived. The India, which was the background to Naipaul's childhood, was an area of the imagination. The journey to India was undertaken as an exploration of this "area of the imagination" but the result was shattering : India turned out to be an area of darkness for Naipaul. He himself wrote

It was a journey that ought not to have been made. It had broken my life into two. (*Area* 215)

Landscapes of the mind whether intellectual or dream Utopias or ancestral areas of darkness — usually shock and shatter when confronted in stark reality.

Thus Naipaul remains an utterly deracinated man, truly homeless, an absolute exile : his spirit remains restless and he has trotted through Egypt, Pakistan and other countries, the cauldrons of ancient civilizations but he is like a suffering bird who is unable to

soar up high in the sky or drop dead in the ocean. Out of his deliverance is born a rich body of writings which have enriched West Indian literature and the English language and have carved out a great name for himself in the realm of English literature.

Naipaul's perception of and anguish at his own displacement and rootlessness is central to his creative talent. It has been the stimulus as well as the subject of his work. Most of his writings issue from a desire to understand his own position in the world. The unique combination of circumstances which related him to three societies and yet left him with a deep sense of homelessness, undeniably play a predominant part in shaping his sensibility and determining his writing career. He states

When I speak about being an exile or a refugee, I'm not just using a metaphor (*Newsweek* 34)

He was born in exile and was cut off from his cultural and racial roots. Then he was forced into another exile from the land of his birth. He was completely lost and he made a desperate attempt to discover himself through his works. He writes

Most imaginative writers discover themselves, and their world through their work. (*Return* 211)

The contradictions inherent in his background form the core of his work. As Landez White says

The struggle against the effects of displacement lies at the heart of his work. (Landez 3)

Exile has been the basic urge behind all his creative writing. The early work is to a large extent an attempt of defining his own situation and seeking an answer to the problem that hampered him at the start — “where he belonged”. From his position of total deracination, he turned his attention to other lost individuals in the “halfmade” societies of the world that were groping for self-definition too. He saw these societies as crippled by the burden of a borrowed culture, of mimicry and parasitism, cultural and intellectual. He saw that the coloniser was now only physically — not really— absent —he was strongly entrenched in the dreams and aspirations of the people. In his books Naipaul’s own personal felt desolation at having nothing that one could honestly call one’s own — neither country nor culture nor traditions — is reflected.

It was looking back to the Trinidad of his childhood from the distance of London that produced his first four books — the first being *Miguel Street*. It was written in 1955 and published in 1959. It is a very interesting fact to note that the stories are revealed by a boy narrator whose view of the character changes as he grows up and who at last like Naipaul leaves Trinidad for England on scholarship. His early novels may be viewed together as comedies of Trinidadian manners. The comic aspects inherent in a country’s confused

transition from a colonial to an independent status, in multiracial misunderstandings and rivalries and in the ironic contrasts thrown up by the abrupt introduction of democratic processes in a largely illiterate and amorphous society, are all fully exploited. His first four books display the Joycean pattern of response to exile — the obsessive concern to recreate in fictional terms — the home the author has left behind him. There is the characteristic touch of nostalgia and regret in the record of the passing away of the Hindu order and for a lost world of childhood innocence in the *Miguel Street*.

Naipaul calls *Miguel Street* as “very much a young man’s book”. This book is complete picture of social reality of West Indian society. This book reveals the frustrations, failures and aspirations of common man of West Indies. *Miguel Street* represents a part of Port of Spain

Where the stories were not stories of success but of failures (*Passage* 44)

It seems that people are all herded like sheep, where they can neither prosper nor escape. The place has no facility for its brilliant minds to flourish. All the characters of the novel are failures in their life. One of the major characters of novel Hat says :

Life is helluwa, you can see trouble coming and you can’t do a dear thing to prevent it coming. (*Miguel* 12)

Ironically the vitality and fervour of Hat and those like him come from the stoic view of life. The narrator finally succeeds in leaving the

place. Besides him other have also attempted to escape but only few have succeeded.

Miguel street is Microcosm of the colonial Trinidad, the colony of many ethnic groups with their own distinctive culture and customs. The colonial society does not provide any avenue to the people of lower strata of society. The search for identity is a lifelong process. Perhaps one life is insufficient for their search as the problems are massive and overbearing. Rootless and alienated they continue to live in a world of cultural confusion. Naipaul has observed their living conditions and attitudes minutely from close quarters. The story of those exiles has been narrated by a young narrator who at places turns out to be V.S. Naipaul himself.

His second book *The Mystic Masseur* is also a painful story of a man's repudiation of his origins. It tells the opposite tale of process — not of recovery, but of loss — of how Ganesh Ramsumair, a brahmin of Indian origin becomes G. Ramsey Muir a mimic man. The Indian protagonist Ganesh has gone through continuous changes in his life span. Failure in the first occupation forced him to step into the other and he became an unsuccessful primary school teacher. Ultimately he becomes a member of British executive council but in this process he loses his identity and acquires an English name G. Ramsey Muir.

Naipaul's third book *The Suffrage Of Elvira* is a spiritual comedy about the election to legislative council in a rural part of Trinidad called Elvira, a place of a mixed society. Hindus, Muslims, Blacks and the Spanish lived together and although people have a desire to keep their own identity they still mingle with each other freely and even celebrate festivals of each other. Every one owns a Bible though Hindus and Muslims look at it with awe, of course not with respect. People of Elvira consider goddess Lakshmi as a goddess of property. Elvira has a hybrid culture, if it can be called a culture at all. In such a society democracy is not possible because the citizens of Elvira are not socially and politically conscious and mature enough to acquire democracy.

The main protagonist Harbans, who wins the election, turns a blind eye to the problems of the citizens : so they burn his new jaguar car. By winning the election, the dream of Harbans has been realised, but it has also disillusioned him. His experience as politician leads him to conclude

This democracy is a strange thing. It does make the great poor and the poor great (*Suffrage* 156)

He shouts,

Elivira, you is a bitch (*Suffrage* 206)

He leaves Elvira. V.S. Naipaul ironically comments

And democracy took root in Elvira (*Suffrage* 193)

In his departure is the power of uncertainty in the life of an emigrant; in moments he may discover fulfilment and joy but in reality he remains for ever a soul hungry and sad. Departure too, remains a hope which will never be accomplished. In fact Harbans like Hat, Ganesh, the boy narrator is an exile for whom departure becomes a compulsion. The pangs of emigration acquire a metaphoric dimension.

Naipaul's Masterpiece is *A House For Mr. Biswas* which critics have also called autobiographical novel. This novel depicts the story of a Trinidad born Indian, Mohan Biswas, from birth to death. It does so in a manner so comprehensive that as in life so from the fictional world of the book, many layers of meanings emerge. The story of Biswas's career from being a fatherless, homeless child of six to becoming a father of four established in a house of his own at the time of his death, is also a social history of the Indian community in Trinidad and by extension in the West Indies. Although the novel focusses its attention on the community of Hindus from India, this community is seen as part of the colonial society of a West Indian island. *A House For Mr. Biswas* employs the house as a metaphor to signify political freedom. The house as an ideal is the West Indies freed from English colonialism. The West Indians are fed up with suppressive rules of the Whites, they are born with the stigma of inherent inferiority to the White masters. They are removed from

their motherland. They become an alien at the mercy of their white masters. And due to their dependant status, they become an easy prey for the machinations of exploitation. Mr. Biswas is one of the alienated and exploited exiles working for rehabilitation. This process of making the foster country their house has never been an easy job. For Mohan Biswas also it is a very crucial and difficult task, failure in achieving the goal turns an exile into a desperate and angry man.

Mr. Biswas rebels in the same spirit. He represents the rebels of the colonial society. The rebels are punished severely through rejection and condemnation :

The quest of Mr. Biswas for a house and the attempt of the Tulsis to correct him into subjugation can be interpreted as the colonial's struggle against colonization and the bid of colonizer to preserve its power and authority through overt as well as subtle terms of oppression. (Kirpal 65)

The house of his own is a token of self identity in a colonial foster country for alien. There he can live with dignity and self respect. The house symbolises a freed West Indian and gives meaning to life.

In his next novel *Mr. Stone And The Knights Companion* Naipaul raises a contemporary psychological and sociological problem of modern times. The materialistic civilization has spoiled the social relationships : human feelings and emotions are no longer held relevant

in modern times. All relationships in modern society are seen through the spectacles of money. Once a person attains the age of retirement, he is pushed into a life of inactivity and emptiness to wait till "The last syllable of recorded time". Then he passes into oblivion. The broken family life and the nuclear family system are incapable of providing any solace to the old retired people and this is not only the problem of the main protagonist Mr Stone, but of thousands of Mr Stones who are confused and depressed of approaching retirement. Naipaul very masterfully explores "the sense of terror" that prevails in the metropolis of the world.

Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* has a similar theme like that of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men". The novel moves towards "a goal that is goallessness". The novelist reveals a greater theme of chaos and order in *The Mimic Men* than in his earlier novels. Here chaos and order are related to the game of politics and power. The novel does not offer any solution to the problems faced by the people of Isabella. It just awakens the consciousness of the readers to their problems. In his another novel, *In a Free State* Naipaul asserts that exile is the primal condition of man. He through his prologue and epilogue emphasises that while we are bound by our culture and history, we are also adrift *In a Free State*

Naipaul's *Tell Me Who To Kill* is as much a story of hate which becomes mere self destruction and tragic as it is of an outburst of love. The narrator, an Indian from the West Indies, also ends getting confined in a room in London as his only brother marries a white woman. His extreme love for his brother changes into hate, his anger and disappointment are the result of frustration. The exile in an alien land becomes a victim of hatred, distrust and the one who can be easily exploited. The desire for White women and to be treated as sahib motivate the coloured Asians to go to the West though ultimately these people discover that the hearts of English men are hard like block of stones. These people always remain exiles.

In Naipaul the colonial problem of identity matures into a universal problem and the issue of Indian indentured people becomes a world issue of existence and a citizen of Trinidad becomes a World citizen. The search of individual identity, started in *Miguel Street* recurs in major novels of the last phase : *In A Free State*, *Guerillas* and *A Bend In The River*. They have a universal appeal. He looks deeply into the society to portray, the predicament of a world citizen, who has to struggle to keep himself alive. Naipaul in these novels of African phase uses a different scenario to present his vision of a man torn between the opposite forces of his own land and the land of living, of his present and past. In all these situations the protagonist is alienated and becomes an exile. The quest for

identity, search for a home, are shattered by the battle of the African working for his own identity. It is everyman's crusade. Each one is fighting his own war for self-assertion and identity. The quest for finding one's own identity and oneself will continue. The quest is eternal. It is not just limited to the citizen of the third world countries. It is a universal theme and the literature of the twentieth century is so preoccupied with this theme that it is called literature of exile. It reflects the general disillusionment that beset the two post war generations and the deep spiritual isolation felt by man in a universe in which he felt himself to be inconsequential and a stranger.

As long as men live, they will be lead forward by the spirit of search and will put up a brave fight. The quest for identity saves them from being down by a sense of failure. They try to write their own history and find a centre of their suffering and agony. But the search leads nowhere. History can never be fully re-written or altered. Man's effort finally seems futile, but man goes on in spite of the failures. Naipaul appears to be in full grip of the philosophy of "the absurd". The redeeming feature of his writing which he arrives at in *The Enigma Of Arrival* is the realisation that man's search for identity and finding a home for the exile may remain a permanent pattern of human predicament. In man's struggle a point is reached where he reconciles with the human predicament and

lives on. And this realisation that man must live through the enigma reveals the maturity and a fuller understanding of V.S. Naipaul.

Naipaul's fiction and non-fiction deals with the twentieth century themes of the fragmentation of the social order, the sense of the void, the meaninglessness of endeavour in an amoral universe. Naipaul portrays a very black and pessimistic vision in his works. His realism concedes nothing to the desire for comfort and consolation lurking even in the toughest heart. His uncompromising honesty to his vision makes him an excoriating writer. His books are difficult not because they are thought provoking and too real but difficult because as T.S. Eliot has stated that "Human beings cannot face much reality".

Naipaul's travelogues are also termed as his masterpieces because they are his very personal response to the problems of third world countries. His travel writing is not only an intellectual adventure but they are also human documents. The kind of understanding he looks for in course of his travels comes best through the people. He doesn't force any thing, he doesn't have a spokesman. Whatever speculation is there in his travel writings, results from the interaction of characters of flesh and blood with an identity of their own. Naipaul first non-fictional assignment led to the publication of *The Middle Passage*. The proposal that he write a non-fiction book about the Caribbean came from the premier Eric Williams, when

Naipaul was in Trinidad in September 1960 on a three month government scholarship. Naipaul hesitated: non-fiction, he felt was not his thing but decided to take the risk. *The Middle Passage* was completed in December 1961 and even before it could be published Naipaul had set off to another journey to India. This journey too was to lead to a book of non-fiction and so a pattern was set; travel becomes his means and non-fiction his mode of examining the societies of the third world. Since then Naipaul has travelled extensively and all his works have been the outcome of these journeys.

The title of his first book of non-fiction *The Middle Passage* refers to the terrible journey which brought Millions of Negro slaves to the islands of the Carribean. They were travellers whose journey never ended — who were never to reach “home”. Permanently dispossessed, they lived in a state of perpetual temporariness. This journey has a parallel in that of the immigrant labourers brought mainly from India to work on the former slave plantations — linking the fates of the Blacks and these later immigrants. Their unsettled status has lent a quality of temporariness to their lives. Naipaul rejects the land where he was born. In *The Middle Passage* he sees men and women of West Indies imitating the white people whom they consider superior to themselves.

In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul comments that in Trinidad

To be modern is to ignore local products. (*Passage* 42)

The Middle Passage is not only an acute critical analysis of the West Indian society but also an examination of Naipaul's own relation to it and of the reasons why he rejected it. Williams Walsh has rightly called *The Middle Passage* "the journal of an identity (Walsh 17)". The first visit after ten years reawakens all that old fears and old antipathies. When Naipaul is about to board Francisco Babadillo, he begins "to feel all my old fear of Trinidad (*Passage* 42)". It was only when he begins writing *The Middle Passage* that Naipaul is able to examine this fear. The examination leads only to a confirmation of the earlier rejection — there can be no return for him.

Naipaul's second travelogue was written about India — the land of his ancestors. He came to India with the hope of finding his roots over here but India betrayed him, did not provide any solace to him. He came to recognise a cultural estrangement from India. It became to him a land of myths, an area of darkness and this is the name which he gives to his first travelogue on India, *An Area of Darkness* which he wrote in 1964. Naipaul was disappointed by India on his first visit, India's docility, its submissiveness, its self absorption, all annoyed him. Whatever he had imagined about India proved to be false. The real life encounter upset all that. The boundaries of an imagined past blurred and disturbed the delicate balance of the colonial self, Naipaul's India in the first home coming is a journey which is repelling instead India of concretising itself as the promised

land. It showed a heterogeneity which he found himself unable to cope with. He found India poor disordered, disorganised and above all devoid of vitality. Over and above, it did not provide any roots to him. The first journey broke the life of Naipaul into two, he regretted making this journey. Naipaul makes another effort to come to terms with the strangeness of India and the result of this journey appears in his travelogue entitled India - A Wounded Civilisation.

In the preface to India - A Wounded Civilisation Naipaul remarks:

India for me is a difficult country. It is not my home and cannot be my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights (*India* 9)

And that is precisely Naipaul's dilemma : "belonging and not belonging". Deep down in him there is a struggle to understand this difficult country. It is because of this that he keeps coming to India looking for some assurance and may be for a larger cultural perspective. On his first visit he was not satisfied with the "obvious". He had come prepared for an encounter which would reveal the spirit of India with which he wished to identify himself although indirectly. His initial response to India's distress was of disillusionment as the India of reality did not square with the image of India that he had carried with him. Naipaul's another travelogue *Among the Believers* seems to be an attempt to open out new

territories for his writing. It too is an account of journey to certain Muslim states and is subtitled - *An Islamic Journey*. He undertook this journey out of curiosity because he had found a curious and interesting contrast between the sophisticated Westernised selves of some Iranians and also the enthusiasm which they felt for the Islamic revolution. The split personalities and contradictions that Naipaul notices with so much irony, in the Iranians in the U.S. are not a mark of hypocrisy but the natural result of a conflict between inherited traditional culture and religion and an acquired way of life.

Travelling to Iran with the opinion derived from the interpretation of a novel, Naipaul only sees everywhere evidence that confirms this view. Thus the section on Iran concludes with the comment

That civilization could'nt be mastered. It was to be rejected; at the same time, it was to be depended on (*Believers* 82)

Naipaul *Finding The Centre* is partly autobiographical and partly a travelogue. It is about two journeys : one is a journey to the author's past and the second is to the Ivory coast, the land of cruelty, hypocrisy and malignancy. There is a great link between the two pieces as both are about journeys, the first is a journey down memory lane to the author's past, his childhood, his beginnings as a writer. Explained by this account is the pain that constantly raises its head whenever Naipaul encounters something that nudges memories of his Trinidadian years. It gives us some idea of what Naipaul means

when he says of his childhood. "There were so many abysses around one. What luck that one didn't just disappear. It is a feeling how did one get away". (*Gussow* 45). The second journey, to the Ivory Coast is determined in a sense by the first, for as Naipaul says, he travels deliberately to places where people live restricted lives. And this is as Naipaul says

My curiosity is still dictated in part by my colonial Trinidad background. I go to places which, however alien, connect in some way with what I already know (*Centre* 10)

The people he meets and whose views and opinions he records for us are also like him "trying to find order in their world looking for their centre". (*Centre* 10)

Thus it can be asserted that all the major works of Naipaul reflect the agony of an exile. Even the characters of his books are rootless people in search of centre like Naipaul and though V.S. Naipaul hails from a small remote corner of the third world, he is not a provincial writer but is one of the greatest living English writers.

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CHAPTER-II

THE MIDDLE PASSAGE —THE CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE

V.S. Naipaul's first travelogue *The Middle Passage* is an objective record of his impressions of five societies : British Guiana, Surinam, Martinique, Jamaica and above all Trinidad — the land of his birth. It is a paradox that though Trinidad is Naipaul's birth place, he does not visit the place out of love for his homeland but because he has been granted a scholarship by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to write a non-fiction book about the Caribbeans. At first Naipaul was hesitant to take up this task but finally he made up his mind and embarked upon a journey to the West Indies and South America and came out with a brilliant impartial travelogue.

V.S. Naipaul very carefully lifts the veil from the face of the Caribbean region and reveals not only the dark past but also portrays the way in which this past is affecting the present. The title *The Middle Passage* refers to the painful journey which brought millions of slaves and Indian immigrants to these islands uprooting them from their native land and making them permanent exiles.

The travelogue *The Middle Passage* holds a very important place and this is due to the fact that it is not just an impartial study of

five societies but rather it is a descent into the writer's own psyche, an exploration of his own roots. *The Middle Passage* also gives a clear proof of Naipaul's aversion for Trinidad, which he considers to be a wasteland. Of his antipathy to Trinidad, he speaks

When I was in the fourth form I wrote a vow on the end paper of my Kennedy's *Revised Latin Primer* to leave within five years. I left after six; and for many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bed-sitters with the electric fire on, I had been awakened by the nightmares that I was back in tropical Trinidad. (*Passage* 43)

Naipaul had rejected Trinidad very early in his life : for him the land offered no scope for developing his talents. It was just a small dot on the world map and was responsible for suffocating many great talents. He says

I knew Trinidad to be unimportant, uncreative, cynical. The only professions were those of law and medicine, because there was no need for any other; and the most successful people were commission agents, bank managers and members of distributive trades. Power was recognised, but dignity was allowed to no one. Every person of eminence was held to be crooked and contemptible. We lived in a society, which denied itself heroes. It was a place where the stories were never stories of success but of failure: brilliant men, scholarship winners who had died young, gone mad or taken to drink; cricketers of promise whose careers had been ruined by disagreements with the authorities. (*Passage* 43-44)

Naipaul has very carefully observed this society which he found was steeped in superstition, ignorance, fraud and deceit. It is a civilization without any identity, without any definite moral lineaments. It is a completely materialistic society where moral values hold no sway. Naipaul found that people in Trinidad were hungry for money and power and they wanted to possess it at any cost. Lawlessness prevailed all over the country and no one possessed nationalist feeling for the country. Naipaul has illustrated this feeling of Trinidad in the following lines

Everyone was an individual, fighting for his place in the community. Yet there was no community. We were of various races, religions, sets and cliques; and we had somehow found ourselves on the same small island. Nothing bound us together except this common residence. There was no profound anti-imperialist feeling; indeed it was only our Britishness which gave us any identity, so protests could only be individual, isolated, unheeded (*Passage 45*)

People living in Trinidad did not consider it to be an important place. For them affairs going on in other countries were more attractive than the local problems

Our interest was all in the world outside, the remoter the better, Australia was more important than Venezuela, which we could see on a clear day. Our own past was buried and no one cared to dig it up. This gave us a strange time sense. The England of 1914 was the England of yesterday. The Trinidad of 1914 belonged to the dark ages (*Passage 45*)

Naipaul is of the view that colonization of the West Indies has spiritually and morally maimed the native consciousness and character. The people undervalue their own traditions and achievements but admire Whiteman for his values, skill and skin and shamefully imitate him thinking him to be an ideal. Naipaul states that in Trinidad

To be modern is to ignore local products and to use those advertised in American Magazines. The excellent coffee which is grown in Trinidad is used only by the very poor and a few middle-class English expatriates. Everyone else drinks Nescafe or Maxwell House or Chase and Sanborn, which is more expensive, but is advertised in the Magazines and therefore acceptable. The elegant and comfortable Morris Chairs, made from local wood by local craftsmen, are not modern and have disappeared except from the houses of the poor. Imported tubular steel furniture, plastic-straw chairs from Hong Kong and spindly cost iron chairs have taken their place. (*Passage* 48-49)

Modernity in Trinidad means alertness, a willingness to change, a readiness to accept anything which films, magazines and comic strips appear to indicate as American. V.S. Naipaul does not like this mad rush for an imitation amongst the natives. He speaks of the influence of American and British Radio services, which have wrought a destruction of the simple life of the Trinidadians

A generation has now been brought up to believe that radio, modern radio, means a song followed by a jingle, soap operas five and fifteen minutes long, continually broken for commercials, so that in a five-minute morning serial like *The shadow....of....Delilah!* to which I found all

Trinidad thrilling two minutes, by my reckoning, were given over to advertising. This type of commercial radio, with its huckstering geniality, has imposed its values so successfully that there was widespread enthusiasm when Trinidad, not content with one such radio service, acquired two (*Passage* 62)

The Trinidadians have a craze for American films. They try to imitate the heroes of these films, and are proud of modernizing themselves by responding to Hollywood formula.

Naipaul feels that blind imitation of the West has closed the mind of the Trinidadians and all of them irrespective of race or class are trying to mould themselves in the image of the Hollywood B-Man. He feels that people of Trinidad are suffering from a loss of identity. He comments

With commercial radio and advertising agencies has also come all the apparatus of the modern society for joylessness, for the killing of the community spirit and the shutting up of people in their separate prisons of similar ambitions and tastes and selfishness; the class struggle, the political struggle, the race struggle (*Passage* 83)

Naipaul observes the West Indian society is not a coherent one. It is a mixed society. The West Indies are paradoxically the home of exiles. The West Indians whether they are Blacks or Whites or Asians are all exiles born into exile. Once the Caribs and Arawaks were exterminated, the region had no native population. The present population of Trinidad consists of people of Amerindian stock and the

descendants of the people of three countries Europe, Africa and Asia who have made their uneasy home on this Island. The main three social groups are Indians, Creoles and the Blacks imported from West Africa by the colonial power for the exploitation of sugar plantations. Indians too came as indentured labourers after the abolition of slavery and the Whites are there since the discovery of the West Indies by Columbus and they are the main rulers and other functionaries in Trinidad.

The relationship between these social groups is not an easy one, but the clash between the Whites and Black is stronger because the Whites had inflicted all sorts of misery on the Blacks. The brutal treatment meted out to the Blacks has been described in James Louis's *Introduction to Islands in Between*

The slave owners did everything they could to prevent a group consciousness. Slaves were usually separated from their fellows who came from the same region of Africa. They weren't allowed to marry. Cultural activities were discouraged, as with work songs, they increased to productivities. Flogging, burning and mutilation, although their extent has been exaggerated by some historians — slaves were valuable — were certainly inflicted both to punish and to demoralize....to baptise a Negro would have been to admit that he was a fellow human being and that he held claims on the owner's conscience. (*James* 13)

Long years of slavery and brutality have made the blacks to believe in the values of their masters. They are hardly aware of their

past: they had been conditioned into accepting the values of their masters and this meant contempt for everything that was African. They came to accept as natural their presence in the land as though they themselves were natives. Naipaul observes

The Negro in the new world was, until recently, unwilling to look at his past. It seemed to him natural that he should be in the West Indies, that he should speak French or English or Dutch, dress in the European manner or in adaptation of it, and share the European's religion and food. Travel writers who did not know better spoke of him as a 'Native', and he accepted this; This is my island in the sun, Mr. Harry Belapante "where my people have toiled since time begun" (*Passage* 71)

The disastrous consequences of the willingness to forget and ignore their roots in Africa and their exaltation of the culture of the Whites have been very realistically summed up by V.S. Naipaul

Pursuing the Christian-Hellenic tradition, the West Indian accepted his blackness as his guilt, and divided people into the white, fusty, musty, dusty, tea, coffee, cocoa, light black, dark-black. He never seriously doubted the validity of the prejudices of the culture to which he aspired. In the French territories he aimed at Frenchness; in the Dutch territories at Dutchness; in the English territories he aimed at simple Whiteness and modernity, Englishness being impossible (*Passage* 72)

This blind imitation of the culture of the Whites is a part of the West Indian dream. The Blacks desperately want to merge themselves with the Whites and this craving to be identified with Whites has

brought deep rooted disturbance in the lives of the Blacks. V.S. Naipaul is of the opinion that no one can reside long in a borrowed culture. He states

Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than more, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands (*Passage* 73)

After critically examining the land of Trinidad and pointing out its deficiencies, Naipaul turns his gaze towards British Guiana and the theme of racial animosity, which he barely touches upon his account of Trinidad, is explored further in his experiences of British Guiana, which also reveals the fact that racial strife, is not limited to one area but widespread throughout the whole Caribbean land. Naipaul begins his account by quoting an epigraph from Anthony Trollope in praise of Demerea as the Elysium of the Tropics the West Indian Happy Valley of Rasseles but the picture which Naipaul presents of the land is in contradiction to this epigraph. He has described the country as always preoccupied with racial antagonism. There are many ethnic groups like Chinese, Indians, Amerindians, Negroes and Martinguans residing in British Guiana and they are always trying to subdue the other groups for their own interest but the main clash is between Indians and Negroes.

In his description of British Guiana Naipaul reveals the cut-throat competition for money and power amongst the Indians and the Blacks. Though other groups like Chinese, Portuguese and

Amerindians are also antagonistic to one other but the clash is not so violent as is found between the Indians and the Blacks. Naipaul points out that the racial antagonism which is widespread in British Guiana is also responsible for polluting the political atmosphere and the major political parties like PPP led by Dr. Jagan and PNC led by Burnham are polarizations along racial lines. Though Dr. Jagan's party had made a great sweep in the elections of 1953 but after its split in 1957 it also became a victim of racial clashes and Dr. Jagan was accused by the blacks of sidelining them and fighting for the cause of Indians.

Naipaul not only centres his mind on the political clashes but also digs into the colonial past of British Guiana from the days when it was under the crippling yoke of the Dutch rulers to that of the Britishers and Americans. V.S. Naipaul also draws our attention to the topography of British Guiana which according to him, has much to do with the malaise that afflicts British Guiana and what surprises Naipaul is that due to its size British Guiana should have been a land of opportunities but unfortunately its opposite has happened. There is much unrest prevailing in the land. What strikes a traveller most is the emptiness and bleakness of the land. Naipaul writes

And emptiness, fly to the interior. First you go over the sugarcane fields besides the brown Denerara River. Abruptly the fields stop and bush begins; and in the bush there are little irregular areas of timorous destruction — indicating attitudes you will learn to associate with

British Guiana — where forest has turned to marshland, for the soil here is poor and hardwood trees cannot easily be made to grow again. Within minutes towns, fields and clearings are passed and you are over the forest, thick and choked and even occasionally flawed by a river that is black or, when caught by the sun, glinting, a vein of gold or red through the dead green. And the forest continues you cease to look, until thirty or forty minutes later, the land breaks up into hills and valleys, beyond which lie the Savannah Lands, in the dry season marbled in green and brown and ochre, scratched with white trails, the beds of diminished streams lined with rich succulent — looking palm trees. Brazil is not far away, equally empty, a vastness not to be comprehended. (*Passage 93*)

From this short description one can gather that British Guiana is not an enchanting land but in its interior it is mainly a land of bush, Savannah and forests and in the midst of this sparsely populated tract of Savannah Land, there are sprinklings of cities like Georgetown, Letham and New Amsterdam. Naipaul is not a mere traveller with an eye for an objective documentation of details but he is also a creative writer who also describes imaginatively. This imaginative rendering of life is manifest in his description of Georgetown. Speaking of Georgetown he says

Georgetown is a white wooden city. One would like to sketch it on the rough dark grey paper, using black ink and thick white paint to suggest the lightness and fragility of the two storeyed buildings, a fragility most apparent at night when light comes through verandas on the top floor, through windows, through open lattice work, and the effect is of those

Chinese ivory palace Miniatures lit up from within. The city was founded by the British but escaped being built by them — British colonial architectures in the West Indies has had few moments of glory — and was largely created by the Dutch, whose influence remains. The streets are laid out on the grid pattern, and in the Dutch manner canals once ran down the centre of the main streets. Most of the canals have been filled in and replaced by asphalt walks lined with the spreading many-branched Saman tree, which in appearance is a nobler Oak (*Passage* 94)

Naipaul has great admiration for the lovely architectural skill of the Guianese in wood:

In wood the Guianese have built mosques with minarets and Hindu temples with balustrades and domes, they have built a Cathedral; they have even managed Victorian Gothic.

Though Naipaul feels that the wooden work reflects the cultural heritage of Guiana he finds the local people have no respect for it he writes about the local people

They are profoundly ashamed of these wooden buildings, regarding them as signs of their poverty and backwardness, shabby substitutes for the concrete of a rich island like Trinidad (*Passage* 94)

Naipaul regrets that in craze of modernization, Georgetown will lose its beautiful splendour, when concrete buildings will replace wooden house.

The city of Georgetown was although founded by the British but instead of their touch, Naipaul finds that there is Dutch influence over there in Georgetown. Apart from describing the physical beauty of the town, Naipaul also shows the reflection of social life by describing the life of affluent section of Georgetown in characters like Abdul, Rahimtoolah, Mr. Mike and Ramekerri Singh at the time of Christmas celebration. The Christmas celebrations may impress a traveller with El-Dorado like atmosphere of British Guiana, V.S. Naipaul is seized with the sight of people in drunken revelry. During his stay at a boarding house Naipaul finds great scenes of drunkenness due to Christmas celebrations. He goes to meet Rahimtoolahs who are considered the elite of the city. Since he is an impartial observer, he is not just taken in by the glitter and elegance of the upper class people. He tries to penetrate deep by revealing the other side of the picture by describing another city of Rupunni which is situated near Georgetown. It is Savannah grassland, cattle country and the most astonishing thing is that one can drive for a day without seeing a cow. Naipaul finds that Savannah country of Rupunni has only cashew trees, mango trees and Sandpaper trees flourishing in it and according to Naipaul in the vast expanse of the Savannah country this sparse vegetation is nothing but Nature's mimicry.

When Naipaul began the journey for the Savannah country, he had imagined that the interior of British Guiana was full of possibilities waiting for exploration, but when he passed through the land he

found that reality was totally different from the picture he had sketched in his mind. A strange sort of loneliness was haunting these lands but there was nothing romantic about these lands and Naipaul further says that the desolation and loneliness which grips a traveller in the course of his journey through the Savannah country of Rupunni becomes all the more dark when one moves close to the Amerindian village. Naipaul has a deep desire to understand the difficult Amerindians who are introverts and do not want to interact with any outsider. Naipaul is attracted by the strange ways of Amerindians and tries to probe their strange behaviour

I had tried hard to feel interest in the Amerindians as a whole, but had failed. I couldn't read their faces; I couldn't understand their language, and could never gauge at what level communication was possible. Among more complex people there were certain individuals who have the power to transmit to you their sense of defeat and purposelessness; emotional parasites who flourish by draining you of the vitality you preserve with difficulty. The Amerindians had this effect on me. (*Passage* 111)

Naipaul realises that Amerindians are very private people, they dread strangers because they want to preserve their primitive society from the baneful influence of modernity. He finds that a notice has been put in a Amerindian village forbidding strangers to enter. Only priests, doctors and District Commissioner were allowed to enter. The notice is not a government order but this has been issued by the village chief. The psychology behind it works also in many primitive societies

in Africa, which dread the disease of modernity and view all strangers with suspicion. V.S. Naipaul minutely observes this psychology of the natives

The Rupunni settlers want to be left alone, though they depend on George Town, there is an unexpressed resentment at the desire of the government in Georgetown to administer the area — this administering of small, widely separated communities is a burden on a poor country — and relation between officials and settlers are not altogether easy. (*Passage* 107)

From this observation of V.S. Naipaul it becomes clear that interiors of British Guiana remain untapped on account of this reluctance of Amerindians to be drawn into mainstream of modernity. The Amerindians find themselves living in very difficult times because the Negroes have gained upper hand. In the beginning Amerindians used to hunt runaway slaves but in these modern times the situation is reverse; they fear the Negroes who have now gained superior position. Naipaul points that due to these clashes prevalent in British Guiana, the condition of this society is terrible. He points out that there is a lot of difference between Trinidad and British Guiana; Trinidad has almost forgotten its humiliating slavery but British Guiana has preserved it. In Trinidad there is no memory of slavery

In British Guiana it is hard to forget it. The very word 'Negro' because of its association with slavery is resented by many black Guianese, the preferred word is 'African' which will cause deep offence in Trinidad. Everyone knows that Amerindians hunted down runaway

slaves. It was something I heard again, from white and black, and on the Rupununi, and wherever one sees Amerindians, it is a chilling memory. (*Passage* 107)

Naipaul tries his best to present an impartial picture of the lands he visits, he does not romanticise the life of the primitives, rather tries to present the life of primitives such as Amerindians or Negroes in their raw elemental selves. He gets an opportunity of viewing a dance at Letham, the administrative centre of Rupununi, the Savannah country. Letham is a frontier city of British Guiana, notorious as a centre of vice and adventure. Talking about the passion of the dancers Naipaul sums up

I had heard that in old days these frontier dances were rough affairs and sometimes ended in brawls. Things were quieter now and I felt that Letham regretted its former reputation, though the dance was still not considered by some to be suitable for respectable women. The earliest dancers were Amerindian, with the respectable looking on with aloof indulgence, as though they didn't know why they had bothered with the long drive, the stay in the bathroom and the *Leite de Roses*...The Amerindian women danced dourly, concentrating on their steps, and seeming to ignore their partners. They brought their barefeet that down on to the ground, in a slight stamping action. (*Passage* 110)

Naipaul tries to paint the lives of Amerindians in all the tints and shades, yet he finds difficult to understand some facts of their lives. What astonishes him is that nearly all the Amerindians are terribly afraid of Kanaima and there is a belief amongst them that

they never die in the natural course, always a Kanaima is behind an Amerindian's death. Naipaul sums about the Kanaima

The Kanaima is a dedicated person; he lives apart; he fasts before a murder, which is carried out in a horrible manner and involves a knotting of the victim's intestines. The Kanaima loses his power if he is ever known. He reveals himself therefore only to his victim. This is why in lonely places Amerindians prefer not to be alone, though even this is not safe, since — who knows? Your companion might be Kanaima. (*Passage* 158)

Thus the above given lines prove that Amerindians are superstitious people who fear that their life is always in danger. It is credible on the part of Naipaul that he has painted both the contrast of life being lived at British Guiana. On one side is the affluent section of people such as Rahimtoolah, Abdul and Ramkerri Singh living a life of luxury and fun and on the other hand are the superstitious Amerindians who live by unreasoning taboos. Apart from describing the life style of various sections living at British Guiana, Naipaul finds that people of British Guiana are lethargic. Though a Guianese official claims that they are lethargic because of their susceptibility to malaria, Naipaul is of the view that lethargy of the Guianese people has much more to do with the long history of slavery than any other consideration.

Slavery, the land, the latifundia, Bookers indenture, the colonial system, Malaria: all these have helped to make a society that is at once revolutionary and intensely reactionary, and have made the

Guianese what he is: slow sullen, independent through deceptively yielding proud of his particular corner of Guiana and sensitive to any criticism he does not utter himself. (Passage 130)

The brutality which had been inflicted on the Guianese has had a long lasting impact on the Africans and as a result Africans value their freedom very much and they want no one to disturb them and so they live just within their society and just within their law.

Naipaul is full of sympathy for the poor folk and observes that Christianity, the main religion, which is the gospel of abounding love for those who are sunk in afflictions, is a part of the colonial instrument designed for exploitation of the poor. On Sunday when the natives observe The Sabbath day, the hymns being sung in church, although on the outer level, reveal that it is all piety and righteousness in British Guiana. However, appearances are deceptive. If one looks closely one finds that Christianity is used as a tool by the imperial powers to sanctify the soulless oligarchy that has been fastened on people reluctant to bear with the yoke of slavery. Naipaul writes

The missionary must first teach self contempt. It is the basis of the faith of Heathen Convert and in these West Indian territories, where the spiritual problem is largely that of self-contempt, Christianity must be regarded as part of the Colonial Conditioning. It was the religion of the slave owners and at first an exclusive racial faith. It enabled the Dutch in Guiana to divide their population into Christians

and Negroes, the Berbice slave rebellion of 1762 was a war between Christians and rebels. The captured rebels were tried for Christian Murder. (*Passage* 172)

Thus even Christianity which should have done the work of linking men with men and should have worked in the direction of breaking the barriers of caste and racial division has allowed itself to be used as a tool and has not lost its racial associations and its links with power and prestige. Naipaul's journey towards there British Guiana reveals many facts of the lives of the natives residing there. On one hand is the luxurious life lived by a few and on the other hand is the narrow, humiliating life of the majority of people. Naipaul feels pathetic for the lives of poor Guianese and reveals how people are still exploited for monetary gains : V.S. Naipaul during the course of his journey makes Surinam his next destination which is situated on the north eastern cost of South America. Surinam was occupied by the British and when they left in 1667, it became a Dutch territory and the land after that was inhabited by the Indians, Japanese, Creoles and Bush Negroes. The most striking thing that Naipaul notices is the absence of racial clash between one ethnic group and the other in Surinam. Naipaul finds himself in a totally different scenario and Surinam stands in sharp contrast to British Guiana because here the atmosphere is relaxed Naipaul states with regard to Surinam that

With Negroes, East Indians, Dutch, Chinese and Japanese, Surinam has a population more mixed than that of British Guiana and Trinidad. Yet it does not have the racial problems of these territories, though there is inevitably a growing rivalry between the Negroes and East Indians, the two largest groups. With Dutch realism the Surinamers have avoided racial collision not by ignoring group differences but by openly acknowledging them. The political parties are racial, but the Government is coalition of these parties. Every group is therefore committed to the development of the country. (*Passage* 180)

Naipaul finds that on the surface everything seems quiet and serene and it seems the political parties of Surinam are committed to the overall development of their land and there is no major political issue, no racial clash amongst the people. However, being an acute observer he penetrates deep into the politics and finds out that everything is not well with Surinam and the disease that is lurking below the peaceful social life is nationalism which is unsettling. Naipaul observes

With no inflammatory political issues, no acute racial problem, and with the Dutch Government contributing two thirds of the money for the development of the country, nationalism would seem an unlikely and perverse growth. But a nationalism has arisen which is unsettling the established order, proving that the objection to colonialism in the West Indies is not only economic or political or, as many believe, simply racial. Colonialism distorts the identity of the subject people, and the Negro in particular is bewildered and irritable. Racial equality and assimilation are attractive but only underline the loss, since the

accept assimilation is in a way to accept a permanent inferiority.
(*Passage* 181)

Naipaul finds that most immediate cause of nationalism undoubtedly, lies in the denial of material needs of life by the alien rulers but it is not just anger against alien administration. Nationalism has arisen in Surinam because people of the land do not want to remain confined within the shackles of bondage clamped on them by an external power. In Surinam the leader of the nationalists is Edward Bruma, a Negro lawyer in his middle thirties. Edward Bruma claims that the movement has no basis in racial resentment and is not directed against any racial group. Naipaul, though he has admiration for Surinamers for not giving a strident tone to national movement in the manner of Jamaicans, also feels that despite all talk of culture Surinamer have little idea of the diversity and the richness of their own country. He states

The Creoles know only Europe; they have made no attempt to get to know the Javanese or the Indians and it is only recently, under the Nationalist stimulus, that they have tried to understand the bush Negroes. One Nationalist even suggested that the existence of Javanese and Indian culture in Surinam was a barrier to the development of a national culture! This pointed to the confusion and the unexpected racial emotions that lie at the back of the Nationalist agitation. The cultural problem in Surinam is mainly a problem for the Negro; It is only he who has rejected his past, all that attaches him to Africa. (*Passage* 187)

Naipaul is touched when he presents the heart-rending account of slavery in Surinam. He cites from Stedmen's narrative

The colony of Surinam is reeking and dyed with the blood of African Negroes....a young female slave whose only covering was a rag tied round her loins, which like her skin was lacerated in several places by the stroke of the whip. The crime which had been committed by this miserable victim of tyranny, was the non-performance of a task to which she was apparently unequal. (*Passage* 202)

After the sojourn to Surinam Naipaul embarks on a journey to Martinique. The most astonishing thing about Martinique is that though it is a West Indian country, it does not have the native Caribbean flavour. V.S. Naipaul terms Martinique as resembling to France because one finds French influence all over. Even the people of Martinique take pride in calling themselves French and Naipaul says that arriving from Trinidad, a person has the feeling that he has crossed not the Caribbean but the English Channel

The policemen are french; the street name plates in blue-and-white enamel are French; the cafes are French; the menus are French and are written in a French hand. The landscape in the south, is not stridently tropical. Rolling pasture land, worn smooth and unfruitful by civilization,, with dark blobs of scattered trees, and little claws and tongues of lands sticking out into the clear sea, suggest a gentler Cornwall. Unlike the other islands, which have one main town to which everything gravitates, Martinique is full of little French villages each with its church mairie and war memorial each with its history and its illustrious for whose

descendents pews are reserved in the Church. The radio station announces itself as 'Radiodiffusion française'. The political posters are of metropolitan France and unlike anything else in the Caribbean (*Passage* 212)

Naipaul regrets the fact that the successful management of Martinique reveals not France's good husbandry of her empire but the ugly phenomenon of imperialism which has the sole goal to make wanton inroads into the colony and to spoil it for its selfish gains. With regard to Martinique's condition Naipaul writes

Once because of their wealth, a people had been enslaved; now because of their beauty, a people were being dispossessed. (*Passage* 210)

Naipaul points out that bitter racial rivalry prevails in Martinique, he says that though Martinquans are pleased to call themselves Frenchmen but this can be only outside Martinique. In the land itself the people are just black Frenchmen or brown Frenchmen or white Frenchmen. Naipaul remarks

If the French have exported their civilization to Martinique, they have also exported their social structure. The hard social prejudices of the Metropolitan bourgeoisie have coalesced with the racial distinctions derived from slavery to produce the most organized society in the West Indies. In this society education and money and cultured Frenchness matter, but Negro blood is like an ineradicable commonness, a mark of slave ancestry; and in this society, with its single standard of bourgeois Frenchness, social prejudices (which might be racial prejudices) are of importance. (*Passage* 217)

The most pathetic part of Naipaul's journey to Martinique comes to us, when he not only talks about the sufferings of Martiniquans only but also about suffering that is writ large on the countenance of the Caribbeans. Naipaul has very sympathetically portrayed the plight of the Caribbeans

The Caribbeans has been described as Europe's other sea, the Mediterranean of the New World. It was a Mediterranean which summoned up every dark human instinct without the complementary impulses towards nobility and beauty of older lands, a Mediterranean where civilization turned satanic, perverting those it attracted. And if one considers this sea, which the tourist now elivens with his fantastic uniform, as a wasteful consumer of men through more than three centuries the aboriginal population of some millions wiped out; the insatiable plantation; 3,00,000 slaves taken to Surinam, which today has a Negro population of 90,000 the interminable wars; 40,000 British soldiers dead between 1794 and 1976 alone and another 40,000 discharged as unfit - it would seem that simply to have survived in the West Indies is to have triumphed. (*Passage* 224)

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The journey to West Indian islands comes to an end with the visit to Jamaica — a land of contrasts. On the one hand Jamaica has beautiful turquoise sea, white sands, reverential bowtie black servants, expensive bars, clubs and hotels cocktail parties and luxurious parties but it is also the land of the slums, where houses are packed to bursting point with filth and rubbish. Naipaul laments the condition of Jamaica because he is not a traveller who is visiting the land only for sights, he

wants to have a close look at the lives of the people residing in Jamaica. The Negroes residing in Jamaica started *Ras Tafarians* movement, which is a reply to rejection with rejection. For centuries whites had inflicted heaps of disgrace and humiliation on the Blacks and the Blacks look upon Jamaica as their Babylon — the land of Captivity. To the Blacks Jamaica is the world of the white and brown and yellow man V.S. Naipaul says

They are not interested in—indeed some discourage — improvements in Jamaica, for much improvements might only encourage them to remain in slavery in Babylon. Already the Jamaican Government is compelling black men to go to England, where queen Elizabeth 1— reincarnated II— and her lover Philip of Spain — reincarnated as Philip, Duke of Edinburgh — rule as the last sovereigns of white, black — enslaving Babylon (*Passage* 238)

Naipaul sees the difference in the life styles of the Blacks and the Whites : he finds that on both sides there is unreason. The Whites and their brown allies are unreasonable in their brutal exploitation of the Blacks and the Blacks are also not sensible in not regarding Jamaica as their land and are fascinated into the campaign for a return to Africa.

Naipaul finds that there is a vast difference in the lifestyle of these communities. The rich White tourists enjoy the private white sand beaches of hotels where the charge for one day exceeds the average earnings of a Jamaican for a month, and his own stay at

Frenchmen's café confirms the fact of the whites living a luxurious life in Jamaica.

Naipaul ends his journey of the Caribbean lands on a note of despair. He regrets that the West Indians not only suffer from poverty but also from a loss of identity. Centuries of slavery has bred self-contempt amongst these people and is hampering their development. He states

For seven months I had been travelling through territories which, unimportant except to themselves, and faced with every sort of problem, were exhausting their energies in petty power squabbles and the maintaining of the petty prejudices of petty societies. I had seen how deep in nearly every West Indian, high or low, were the prejudices of race; how often these prejudices rooted in self-contempt; and how much important action they prompted. Everyone spoke of nation and nationalism but no one was willing to surrender the privileges or even the separateness of his group. Nowhere except perhaps in British Guiana was there only binding philosophy : there were only competing sectional interests with an absence of a feeling of community, there was an absence of pride, and there was even cynicism. There was, for instance little concern about West Indian emigration to Britain. It was a lower class thing; At another level, it was regarded with malicious pleasure as a means of embarrassing the British people, a form of revenge; and in this pleasure there was no thought for the emigrants or the dignity of the nation about which so much was being said and which on every side was said to be 'emergent'. And the population was soaring — in thirty years Trinidad has more than doubled its population

and the race conflicts of every territory were growing sharper. (*Passage* 253-254).

In the end it can be said that Naipaul turns out to be an impartial observer of the West Indies. He clearly points out the fears, frustrations of the West Indian people but unfortunately he is unable to link himself with that land. He remains an impartial observer and though Trinidad is his birth place it fails to provide Naipaul his roots. Rejecting the West Indies Naipaul embarks upon another journey to India in the hope of finding the centre of his being in India.

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## CHAPTER - III

### INDIA'S DARKNESS AND WOUNDS

#### (a) An Area of Darkness

#### (b) India - A Wounded Civilization

The land of one's origin is always an integral part of one's identity and discovering one's roots either culturally or racially can be both interesting or painful experience, painful because may be at the end of the search one is completely disillusioned or perhaps one discovers facts one never expected and interesting because after all at the end of the search one gets a kind of revelation. This curiosity to know the land of his forefathers brought V.S. Naipaul to India for the first time in 1962 and what he saw shocked him to the extent that he regretted his decision of visiting India and he stated

It was a journey that ought not to have been made; it has broken my life in two (*Area* 265)

V.S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* is his first impression about India. The very title of the travelogue suggests clearly what Naipaul thought India to be after his one-year stay in India. He had come to India in the hope of finding his roots, the trip only confirmed his rootlessness. India proved to be a land of myths, an area of darkness. Naipaul is a rootless writer in search of his identity.

Earlier in his life he had rejected his birthplace Trinidad as he found that land suffocating and too small for his expectations. He shifted to London in the hope of discovering his roots and exploiting his talents. Though he was successful in latter but his dream that England would become the centre of his being, did not materialize and he felt lost in London. He states

London was not the Centre of my world. I had been misled (*Area 42*)

London just turned out to be V.S. Naipaul's commercial centre, making him materially comfortable but did not provide him any spiritual pleasure. Rejecting London Naipaul turns to India, looking upon it as a haven where his tormented self may have some kind of relief and may recover back balance and sanity. Naipaul's journey to India is an exploration of the self, it is an inward journey to the land mysteriously darker and farther away than Trinidad. William Walsh writes about Naipaul's journey to India

Naipaul's return to India is as much a research into himself as into another country. He is crawling on sensitive naked feet through the tunnels of his own self (Walsh 16)

Another critic D.J. Enright regards that the first travelogue on India, *An Area of Darkness* is perhaps

Not exactly about a journey, a country but largely about himself, a hybrid production, part novel with himself as hero, villain, victim and at times clown (Enright 8)

Naipaul's journeys to India have been in many ways inverted journeys. He has entirely changed the pattern of travelling, which has ceased to be a journey into the exterior world and converted it into a kind of homecoming. The homecoming of Naipaul works at many levels. There is the level of a journey to his forefather's land symbolizing the return of the native son. At other level it is also a journey towards the recovery of the self, the self that was lost in the colonial world of Trinidad and shattered and limited within it, and at this level it becomes a search for completeness. These journeys also work at a third level where his expatriate sensibility is discounted, where his heritage is in the background, and instead there is a strong need to encounter the past over and over again, to repeat his experience to belong. Naipaul loves to repeat his journeys and in doing so not only relieves the experience but also makes his adjustments.

Hailing from a small island of Trinidad, Naipaul always dreamt of belonging to a larger and grander country and he was quite optimistic of the fact that this desire would be fulfilled by linking himself with India, he comments

Coming from a small island Trinidad is no bigger than Goa I had always been fascinated by size and Trinidad was small remote and unimportant  
(*Area 22*)

Naipaul's colonized self had sought a recovery of self-esteem in the realm of fantasy by building on picture of India seen in the

religious objects of his grand-mother's puja room and pictures of the blue Himalayas, lofty and unconquered. As the grandson of a labourer from the village of Dubes and Tiwaris Brahmins of Uttar Pradesh, India lay about him in his infancy, in the things of the house, the coloured pictures of Hindu deities, the string bed, the brass and sandalwood. It existed too in the secret premises of family action, in a preferred case of self-possession.

India was always an integral part of Naipaul's unconscious; he was no stranger to India, to Indian culture and all that went with it. He had formed a picture of India on the basis of what he learned and imbibed at home in Trinidad. Naipaul had grown up surrounded by mementos of India and this kept India alive in his mind even though only as a mysterious land of darkness from which his ancestors had arrived. Naipaul himself states that the India, which was the background to his childhood, was an area of the imagination. The journey to India was undertaken as an exploration of this area of the imagination but it turned out to be the area of darkness. The result was shattering and Naipaul regretted his decision of visiting India because to his surprise he found that he was not at all linked with India.

Naipaul had imagined India to be a land of promises. He thought that India would welcome him wholeheartedly but when he landed from his ship on the Bombay harbour, he found that the scene was

entirely different. He was harassed by the customs officials. Naipaul claims that Indians are not dynamic people, they have fixed norms, standards and they stick to them. In his chapter entitled "Degree" in *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul expresses his distaste for India. He remarks

I had seen Indian villages; the narrow, broken lanes with green slime in the gutter, the choked back to back mud houses the jumble of filth and food and animals and people, the baby in the dust, swollen bellied, black with files, but wearing the good luck amulet. I had seen the starved child defecating at the roadside while the mangy dog waited to eat the excrement. I had seen the physique of the people of Andhra, which had suggested the possibility of an evolution downwards, wasted body, nature mocking herself, incapable of remission. Compassion and pity did not answer, they were refinements of hope, fear was what I felt, contempt was what I had to fight against, to give way to that was to abandon the self I had known perhaps in the end it was fatigue that overcome me (*Area* 47-48)

V.S. Naipaul condemns the Indians and states that they are mimicsmen, having no individuality of their own. He compares India with Trinidad and states that in India

The outer and inner worlds do not have the physical separateness which they had for us in Trinidad. They coexist; the society only pretends to be colonial and for this reason its absurdities are at once apparent, its mimicry is both less and more than a colonial mimicry. It is the special mimicry of an old country which has been without a native aristocracy



for a thousand years and has learned to make room for outsiders, but only at the top. The mimicry changes, the inner world remains constant, this is the secret of survival. And so it happens that, to one whole area of India....Yesterday the mimicry was mogul; tomorrow it might be Russian or American; today it is English. (*Area* 62-63)

Naipaul observes that even though the colonizers are physically not present but their presence can be felt in each and every sphere of society. He finds that even the buildings, dress habits and language seems to be influenced by the Britishers. Naipaul feels shocked. He states

Before the reminders of this England of India, then I ought to have been calm. But they revealed one type of self-deception as self-deception. And though this was where fantasy was permissible, the revelation was painful. It was an encounter with a humiliation I had never before experienced and perhaps more so to me than to those Indians who hurried about streets with unlikely English names, in the shadow of imperial grand houses, as others might have felt for me the colonial humiliation. I did not feel in Trinidad. (*Area* 234-35)

Naipaul feels that the English have left behind a permanent colonial heritage – the worship of Englishness.

The English as Indians say again and again, did not become part of India, and in the end they escaped back to England, they left no noble monument and no religion save a concept of Englishness as a desirable code of behavior of – chivalry it might be described, tempered by legalism – which in Indian minds can be dissociated from the fact of

English rule, the vulgarities of racial arrogance or the position of England today. (*Area* 251-252)

### Naipaul further comments

This concept of Englishness will survive because it was the product of fantasy, a work of national art, it will outlast England. It explains why withdrawal was easy, why there is no nostalgia such as the Dutch still have for Java, why there was no Algeria and why after less than twenty years India has almost faded out of the British consciousness; the Raj was an expression of the English involvement with themselves rather than with the country they ruled. (*Area* 252)

Naipaul finds that while the British colonizer was a victim of the self-created myth of white man's supremacy in all spheres, the Indian after independence created the myth of his country's being highly advanced in every walk of life, prior to the coming of the British to the country. Naipaul states

It is well that Indians are unable to look at their country directly, for the distress they would see would drive them mad and it is well that they have no sense of history, for how then would they be able to continue to squat amid their ruins, and which Indians would be able to read the history of his country for the last thousand years without anger and pain? It is better to retreat into fantasy and fatalism, to trust to the stars in which the fortunes of all are written — there are lecturers in astrology in some universities — and to regard the progress of the rest of the world with the tired tolerance of one who has been through it all before. The aeroplane was known to ancient India, and the telephone, and the atom

bomb. There is evidence in the Indian epics. Surgery was highly developed in ancient India; in an important national newspaper, is a text of lecture proving it. Indian ship-building was the wonder of the world. And democracy flourished in ancient India. Every village was a republic; village council could hang an offending villager or chop off his hand. This is what must be recreated, this idyllic ancient India. (*Area* 252-253)

Naipaul feels that since neither is he a Britisher nor an Indian so he can not cling to either of the myth which the Britishers and the Indians cling to. He had migrated from Trinidad to make himself a writer but feels that England does not turn out to be the land of his dreams and there in England, he clings to fantasized image of India for twelve long years. However, coming to India for the first time he finds that his fantasy has collapsed. He is exposed to poverty, inefficiency, confusion, destruction and also has to confront the fact that British have not only conquered India but have completely maimed India and have left permanent scars. Naipaul discovers that he is unable to link himself with other fellow Indians. He states

I was not English or Indian, I was denied the victories of both. (*Area* 118)

The childhood fantasy of India can no longer be the centre of Naipaul's being and India forces Naipaul to confront himself and endeavour to discover whether he can relocate the center of his being.

lack of understanding of Indian culture. Naipaul comments that lack of sanitation makes India a diseased society. He states

Sanitation was linked to caste, caste to callousness, inefficiency and a hopelessly divided country, division to weakness, weakness to foreign rule. This is what Gandhi saw, and no one purely of India could have seen it. It needed the straight simple vision of the west. (*Area* 23)

It is simply an exaggeration on the part of Naipaul when he says that it needs straight simple vision of the West to cope with the problem of sanitation. It appears that Naipaul is somewhat tilted in favour of the West and is bent on proving that the East has nothing except dirt and filthiness, whereas the west has everything which a civilized culture should have.

V.S. Naipaul critically comments on India's Father of the Nation, Mahatama Gandhi

He saw India so clearly because he was in part a colonial. He settled finally in India when he was forty-six, after spending twenty years in South Africa. There he had seen an Indian community removed from the setting of India; contrast made for clarity, criticism and discrimination for self-analysis. He emerged a colonial blend of East and West, Hindu and Christian. (*Area* 92)

To comment that Gandhi is a colonial and a blend of the East and the West, Hindu and Christian, is to downgrade the important position he occupies amongst Indian people. He forgets that the archetypal pattern of life is not ruled by geographical configuration that

basic human emotions are the same and are not restricted to one area and that even the principles of Hinduism and Christianity are alike. The difference lies only in the manner of exposition of the essential spirit of humanity, which is ubiquitous all over the world. Thus Naipaul's comments that Gandhi is a blend of Hindu and Christian is not in conformity with things as they are in themselves.

The assertion of V.S. Naipaul that Nehru possesses more Indian-ness in him is also wide off the mark. It seems that Naipaul has not properly analyzed and studied about these two great leaders of India. Both of them were great nationalists and allotting them ranks is nothing but an exercise in self-vanity.

Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi differed because of their temperaments. One had an artistic bend of mind and the other had an analytical temperament

Gandhi never loses the critical, comparing worth African eyes he never rhapsodizes, except in the vague Indian way about the glories of ancient India. (*Area* 93)

Their methods were different but the goal was same and that was fighting for the cause of their motherland.

It also seems that V.S. Naipaul has also not properly understood the great Indian religious book *Geeta* which propagates selfless action irrespective of reward. He appears to denigrate *Geeta* :

This is only Indian distortion, the eternal Indian attempt to incorporate and nullify. The Geeta's selfless action is a call to self fulfilment and at the same time a restatement of degree it is the opposite of the service which Gandhi, the Indian revolutionary, is putting as a practicable day to day ideal. (*Area* 86-87)

This statement of Naipaul pointing that Geeta's selfless action is a call to self-fulfilment and at the same time a restatement of degree is not justified. Even Lord Krishna emphasizes the division of labour in Gita

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः ।

तस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययं ॥

(गीता, अँध्याय ४,१३)

Another mistake which Naipaul makes is that he has projected Gandhi as a revolutionary. Even this assessment is not correct because Mahatma Gandhi did not want to restructure the social system. He wanted to create harmony in society and wanted to win freedom through satyagraha, which has deep religious connotations.

Although Naipaul appreciates Gandhi for realizing the problem of sanitation, he also feels that Gandhi was not successful in providing a solution. He turned out to be a failure in this field

The mahatma had been absorbed into the formless spirituality and decayed pragmatism of India. The revolutionary became a god and his

message was thereby lost. He failed to communicate to India his way of direct looking. (*Area 97*)

Naipaul feels that Gandhi has become part of the ritual of symbolism, which supports the Indian throughout life.

Naipaul states that Indian society has double standards. On the one hand Gandhi is worshipped as a <sup>g</sup>God and on the other hand people use the name of Gandhi and Nehru to cheat others. Naipaul cites the example of a village politician who was dressed in khadi and was giving a public speech and was mentioning the principle of non-violence propagated by Gandhi but who in reality was a murderer and he had killed seventeen people so that he may win the election. Naipaul feels that the Indians have evaded the reality of Gandhi and have reduced him to a symbol which generates only symbolic action. V.S. Naipaul, however, forgets that this is universal human nature and is not a phenomenon of this century only. Even the sixteenth century great dramatist William Shakespeare has mentioned about this flaw of human nature in his famous play *The Merchant of Venice*, where Antonio tries to explain his friend Bassanio that villain Shylock is quoting the Biblical story to hide his own sinister plan. He says

Mark you this ? Bassanio,  
The devil can cite scripture for his purpose  
An evil soul, producing holy witness,  
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek

A goodly apple rotten at the heart.

O what a goodly outside falsehood had.

(Act II scene III lines 93-98)

Even Christians swear by Christ, the apostle of love and non-violence, but practise just the opposite.

Though Naipaul's knowledge about some important aspects of India is inadequate, some of his remarks on India's social and political life are true and hurting. He has brilliantly got at the root of the problems which beset Indian. According to him, there is a gap between precept and practice in India. The Indians make high claims but seldom do anything to realize them. Naipaul very succinctly sums up the Indian ethos

In the beginning a no doubt useful division of labour in a rural society; it has now divorced function from social obligation, position from duties. It is inefficient and destructive it has created a psychology, which will frustrate all improving plans. It has led to the Indian passion for speech-making for gestures and for symbolic action. (*Area* 92)

Naipaul writes that India deals in symbols and cites many examples which prove that reality is quite different in India from the ideals, which Indians have set for themselves. Usually an action in India is symbolic and is quite unrelated to reality. He says that though on Children's day free milk is intended to be distributed to poor children, it often does not reach them and is sold in the open



market of Calcutta. Small pox eradication week is organised but one central minister refused to be vaccinated for some personal religious reasons. Tree plantation week is organised but due to lack of attention most plants die after one week. Naipaul also gives an example of sweepers cleaning the stairs of a hotel in Bombay and leaving them dirtier. He states

Study these four men washing down the steps of this unpalatable Bombay hotel, this first pours water from a bucket, the second scratches the tiles with a big broom, the third uses a rag to slop the dirty water down the steps in to another bucket, which is held by the fourth, after they have passed, the steps are as dirty as before, but now above the blackened skirting tiles the walls are freshly and dirtily splashed, the bathrooms and lavatories are foul the slimy woodwork had rotted away as a result of daily drenching the concrete walls are green and black with slime, but in India you cannot complain that the hotel is dirty. No Indian will agree with you four sweepers are in daily attendance, and it is enough in India that the sweeper attend. They are not required to clean that is a subsidiary part of their function, which is to be sweepers degraded beings to go through the notions of degradation. They must stoop when they sweep cleaning the floor of the smart Delhi café they will squat and move like crabs between the feet of the customer, careful not to touch no one never looking up never rising. In Jammu city you will see them collecting filth from the streets with their bare hands, this is the degradation the society requires of them, and to this they willingly submit. They are dirt they wish to appear as dirt. (*Area* 87-88)

Naipaul regrets the double standards of Indians and says that instead of taking India forward, they are responsible for pushing it back. He points out that caste and creed still matter in India and due to this difference some sections are forced to live in inhuman conditions and members of such sections are denied the status of being human beings.

Naipaul points out that disease of “double think” and “double talk” has also gradually crept into the field of commerce and industry. Owing to this the Indians are losing world market because there is a wide gap between the advertised worth of the article and its real worth.

The function of the businessman is to make money. He might wish to sell shoes to Russia. He therefore sends good samples; the order obtained, he sends a shipload of shoes with cardboard soles. Overcoming foreign distrust of Indian business practices, he gets an order from Malaya for drugs. And sends coloured water. It is not his duty as a merchant to supply genuine drugs or good shoes or any shoes or drugs at all; his duty is, by whatever means, to make money. (*Area* : 88-89).

V.S. Naipaul's criticism of the functioning of the Indians connected with trade and commerce true and trenchant. He gives another example to prove his point. He states

The Tailor in Madras will give you trousers with a false hem. At the first shrinking the trousers are useless. But his label is in the waistband

and he begged you to give his name to others. He can make money only if gets customer and he will get customer, not by making good trousers, but by getting his name known. (*Area* 89)

All this drives home the truth that Indians are hypocrites; they have mastered the art of double talk and double think. This fatal disease of symbolic action has infected every aspect of life in India including the religious one. Naipaul writes about the religious buildings

Even ancient and holy buildings are disfigured. The eighth-century temple at the top of Shankaracharya Hill in Srinagar is hung at the gateway with a multi-coloured sign which would serve a haberdasher's shop. Set into the ancient stonework of one of the temples at Mahabalipuram near Madras is a plaque commemorating the minister who inaugurated the work of restoration. The Gandhi Mandap in Madras is a small colonnaded structure; carved on it are the names of the members of the committee that put the mandap up; the list is taller than a man. (*Area* 93)

V.S. Naipaul further comments that the symbolic action has proved to be the curse of India. According to him, only Gandhi had the capability to deal in symbols successfully.

Yet Gandhi was Indian enough to deal in symbols. So, latrine-cleaning become an occasional ritual, virtuous because sanctioned by the great soul<sup>ed</sup>; the degradation of the latrine-cleaner continued. The spinning-wheel did not dignify labour; it was only absorbed into the great Indian symbolism its significance rapidly fading. (*Area* : 95-96).

There is no gainsaying that Naipaul has correctly laid his finger on the rotting part of India. People in India make big projects but when the time of implementation comes, they shy away from them. People talk very respectfully about Gandhi's gospel but no one puts them into practice. V.S. Naipaul's comment on the fading away of the Gandhian principles has a lot of truth in it. He states

He remains a tragic paradox, Indian nationalism grew out of Hindu revivalism; this revivalism, which he so largely encouraged, made his final failure certain. He succeeded politically because he was revered; he failed because he was revered....It is as if, in England, Florence Nightingale had become a saint, honoured by statues everywhere, her name on every lip; and the hospitals had remained as she had described them. (Area 96)

Naipaul states that though Gandhi has been elevated to the position of a saint, Indians pay little heed to his principles. He further says that nothing remains of Gandhi except his name and the worship of his image. Seminars are organised about non-violence though the country is steeped in wide-spread violence. To say that V.S. Naipaul is critical of each and every aspect of India is to utter only half truth. There are occasions when his fantasies about India appear to be concretized In the valley of Amarnath where he makes pilgrimage, India changes herself into a symbol of essential mystery. The sense of reality lessens:

And these mountains, lakes and streams were indeed apt for legend. Even while they were about you they had only a qualified reality. They could never become familiar; what was seen was not their truth. They were only temporarily unveiled. (*Area* 193-94)

Again, on the path to the cave of Amarnath, a childhood fantasy of India is triggered off

Yet a special joy had been with me throughout the pilgrimage and during all my time in Kashmir. It was the joy of being among mountains, it was the special joy of being among the Himalayas. I felt linked to them, I liked speaking the name, India, the Himalayas; they went together. In many of the brightly coloured religious pictures in my grandmother's house I had seen these mountains, cones of white against simple, cold blue. They had become part of the India of my fantasy. (*Area* : 208).

In the section "*Pilgrimage*" in *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul joyfully speaks of the enthusiasm he finds in the pilgrims and has a deep desire to share their faith. Though Naipaul admires the Indians for their simple faith he finds fault with the erotic cravings of the Indians in some of their religious monuments. He was very eager to see the Indian carvings but when he saw them he felt depressed. He found them too cheap and vulgar. Naipaul does not appear to fully appreciate the Indian sensibility. On the contrary he appears to be puritanical and hypocritical. He negates all that is raw and elemental in life. Since ages, people from all over the world have visited India to see these marvellous carvings and have praised it. Eroticism has often been linked to religion and even in the west great writers, like DH Lawrence,

William Blake, and W.B. Yeats have found no fault in associating the erotic with the religious. Again, commenting on the Indian architecture Naipaul says that there is a vast difference between the monuments of north and the monuments of the south. In the North, marvellous, beautifully made monuments do not possess any continuity whereas the case is different in south. Naipaul gives the example of the Taj Mahal – one of the wonders of the world and says that it is a building which is lying waste, without any function. It is, according to Naipaul, a despot's monument for a woman not of India who bore a child every year for fifteen years. Naipaul states that he has been informed by the guides that it took twenty two years to complete this building and the cost was enormous. He further observes that this money could have been utilised in some public utility programme. However this assessment of Naipaul is unfair because the Taj Mahal satisfies the aesthetic sense of people and provides them pleasure. It is a monument symbolising true love.

V.S. Naipaul states that the Mughal rule in India was a curse and behind the building of marvellous monuments, the hidden motive was personal aggrandizement. This, however, is part truth and the beauty and splendour of the monuments of the Muslim rulers bearing testimony to architectural excellence of the time cannot be denied. While comparing the architecture of north with that of south, Naipaul says that the motive behind the construction of a monument in the north is the self aggrandisement of the plunderer and in south the temples

embody religious and spiritual spirit. Naipaul observes about the South Indian temples

They speak of the continuity and flow of Hindu India, ever shrinking. In the North the ruins speak of waste and failure, and the very Grandeur of the Mogul buildings is oppressive (*Area* 258)

After carefully analysing *An Area of Darkness* one feels that — Naipaul is prejudiced against India. *An Area of Darkness* appeared at a time when India bashing was in fashion. India had undergone the Chinese invasion and the situation was appalling. India was facing famines and food shortages, which forced the country to beg foreign countries for food grains and medicines. Writers like Nirad Chaudhuri and Ronald Segal were spitting venom on India through their books *The Continent of Circe* (1965), and *The Crises of India* (1965). They had written their books for the Western readers who like only a negative view of India. After going through Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness*, one can clearly make out that the India of *An Area of Darkness*, is seen — though British eyes — it is the perception of "white" mind behind a coloured skin. Naipaul's confrontation with the reality of India is marked by withdrawal and retreat leading to his stay on the house-boat in Srinagar. He draws a circle, a house is created a surrogate family constructed and the real India is distanced to be perceived through books, through E.M. Forster's *A Passage of India*, through K.M. Munshi, G.M. Trevelyan, Phillip Woodruff, Nirad C. Chaudhary, Sri Aurbindo Ghosh and Rudyard Kipling. He uses these books as filters

John

and as sounding boards. He forms his concept of India on the basis of these writers and their books. Naipaul's sane Englishness is confused to see the immensity of India, the vastness of its problem and the enormity of its inactivity. Naipaul considers India to be a country that lies to itself, that denies its squalor and inhumanity, in life and in art. He feels disillusioned with India. However, to judge Naipaul as being a harsh critic of India is also wrong because in spite of all his anger and his negative inferences and conclusion there radiates all through the text the passionate concern for this country of his origin. His love and concern for India is obvious. It is a psychological truth that we often harshly criticize those whom we love deeply. Naipaul had hoped to find India different from England. It was not different and wherever it was different it was miserable and wretched. He, however, overlooks certain positive aspects of Indian culture which have attracted even the foreigners.

V.S. Naipaul is unable to dismiss India with a shrug and unconsciously he reveals his attraction for India in his travelogues. Even in *An Area of Darkness* he seems to be a confused man unable to understand his relation with the land of his forefathers.

Naipaul behaves very much like an Indian when he visits the village of the grandfather. He writes

Duty alone had brought me to this town in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. (Area  
321)



The emphasis on the word “duty” is significant here because Naipaul was not very much, excited to see the dirty and the dusty village of his grandfather. In spite of this he was just not fulfilling an obligation. Even in his description of the village, which unsettled him, he seems to suggest something that comes to him as a relief. He notices the “white and clear spires” and is glad. Naipaul himself admits the change that has taken place in his attitude. He writes:

A year before I might have been appalled by what I was seeing. But my eye had changed. The village looked unusually prosperous it was even picturesque. (*Area* 33)

Naipaul finds the Brahmin women attractive in their plain and white saris and without any veils. He says

In their features I could recognise those of the women of my family (*Area* 323)

Naipaul is a deeply conservative man, restless with his rootlessness and wants to establish an affinity with India. On the suggestion of the IAS Officer he gives money to one of the village women Jussodra to arrange a “Katha”, a reading of religious scriptures.

Naipaul seems to be forever trying to remind himself about the Hindu origins and beliefs of his Indian ancestors in the Caribbean. There is some similarity in his home and in the shrine of his grandfather's. When he sees the images in the shrine he says

My mind leapt years, my sense of distance and time was shaken, before me were the very replicas of the images in the prayer room of my grandfather's house (*Area 324*)

Naipaul faces inner tension with regard to India. At times he seems to embrace India and at times he seems to reject her. He accepts "prasad" from the villager Ramchandra in the Hotel. He needs none to understand what he is saying when Ram Chandra is attempting a smile in the verandah. During his second journey to the village he again notices the bad roads, carts, dust and disturbance but he says no terror, no surprise, attached to the land now.

Naipaul rejects the loving hospitality offered by Ramchandra because he has already been told to avoid eating anything in the village. He urges the priest to forget the litigation because he does not want to involve himself in legal hassles. Naipaul's inner tension can be realised from the fact that he denies giving lift to a village boy while he is on his way back from the village. Naipaul rudely says "let the idler walk" (*Area 334*) This incident is symbolic, it reveals the dilemma of Naipaul who does not want the boy to separate himself from his home-land and all associations attached to his land. This can turn him into an exile like the writer, who does not have a sense of belonging to any land. This attitude of Naipaul towards the boy also symbolises his ambivalent attitude towards India. He does not love the country of his origin but he cannot reject

it at the same time. *An Area of Darkness* is a wonderful honest book by Naipaul and his own self-portrait depicted in this travelogue is not a flattering one. Naipaul does not try to show himself as a larger than life man. His sheer honesty and frankness force us to admire him. He is not afraid of appearing prejudiced. Though *An Area of Darkness* appears to be the work of a man, who seems to be bitterly critical of India, it also reveals Naipaur's unconscious love for India.

A superficial reading of *An Area Of Darkness* might leave one with the impression that Naipaul came away from India with an overwhelmingly negative attitude towards the homeland of his ancestors but the truth is that India has continued attracting him resulting in subsequent visits. He is looking for a deeper connection with the country and when he finds it missing he feels disappointed.

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V.S. Naipaul in his earlier visit had termed India as An Area of Darkness. His initial response to India's distress was of disillusionment as the reality of India did not square with the image of India he had carried with him. He was disturbed by India's poverty, lack of sanitation and its inability to cope with its problems. After visiting India for two consecutive times, he came out with the conclusion that India is a "wounded civilization" — a country without any hope, whose borrowed institutions had failed her and who is unable to cope with the modern world. India appears to Naipaul a wounded civilization yet he is attracted towards India and feels an affinity with her. In the preface to *India - a Wounded Civilization* he writes

India is for me a difficult country. It isn't my home and cannot be my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far. (*India* 8-9)

V.S. Naipaul himself reveals his love for the home of his ancestors in these lines; he is not just a tourist visiting India for its beautiful Himalayas or rivers. Deep down in him there is the deep desire to understand this difficult country. This is why he keeps coming to India looking for some assurance; may be for a larger cultural perspective. There is something in him that rises, when he thinks of India, and when he is thus roused, he tries to forge an intimate bond with the country.

This close affinity of Naipaul with India is owing to his having shared religious Hindu practices with the members of Indian community in Trinidad. These religious practices have left a deep impact on Naipaul's mind. He is unable to dismiss them though he is a rationalist and does not have faith in them. He reveals his knowledge of the rituals while describing the practice of sacrifice and its relevance to India's culture. Though he does not find a rational explanation for the impulse to sacrifice, he feels overwhelmed with it and he rightly observes

I know, for instance, the beauty of sacrifice, so important to the Aryans. Sacrifice turned the cooking of food into a ritual: the first cooked thing—usually a small round of unleavened bread, a miniature especially made—was always for the fire, the god. This was possible only with an open fireplace. (*India* 9)

Thus it becomes clear that though Naipaul feels repulsed by India, the country has something to offer to his psyche which he himself is unable to define and Naipaul's travelogue *India : A Wounded Civilization* has to be studied in this context of love and hate towards India.

V.S. Naipaul's *India : A Wounded Civilization* was published in 1977, at the time when India was undergoing the crisis of internal emergency imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Naipaul, like other western observers, concluded that democracy had no firm founda-

tions in India. He felt that Indian psyche has been wounded by successions of invasions. Indians, he comments, have defeatist mentality. Hinduism has made a virtue of submission to authority. Indians, he claims, are unwilling or unable to do anything practical to improve their conditions either socially or individually and this, according to him, is a curse for their life. All this has its origin in the religious attitude of the people.

The first chapter of this travelogue is entitled as "*An old Equilibrium*" and by old equilibrium Naipaul means

The Hindu equilibrium surviving the shocks of an alien culture, an alien literary form, an alien language, and making harmless even those new concepts it appeared to welcome. Identity became an aspect of Karma, self love was bolstered by the ideal of non violence. (*India* 277)

Old equilibrium, according to Naipaul, is a philosophy of quietism, a withdrawal into security, and a retreat from the distress of life. It is the lack of readiness to cope with life that comes in the wake of modernity. Naipaul proves his statement by pointing out that when India was undergoing the crisis of Emergency, many Indians were busy in reconstituting an old temple, which was ransacked by Britishers. Naipaul writes

A twelve lettered mantra will be chanted and written fifty million times; and that is what—in this time of Emergency, with the Constitution suspended, the press censored—five thousand volunteers are doing. When the job is completed, an inscribed gold plate will be placed below

the new idol to attest to the creation of its divinity and the devotion of the volunteers. A thousand year old temple will live again : India, Hindu India, is eternal : Conquest and defilements are but instants in time. (*India* 13-14)

Naipaul finds that Indians are passive people and instead of facing the crisis boldly, they are trying to take refuge in religion. He feels that the Indians have lost their individuality owing to numerous conquests

No civilization was so little equipped to cope with the outside world; no country was so easily raided and plundered, and learned so little from its disasters. (*India* 8)

He further cites the example of Vijaynagar and says that the Kingdom of Vijayanagar was established in the fourteenth century and though the name of the city suggests victory land, the land could never be victorious. It was subject to numerous invasions by Muslim rulers and the city which was once considered as being one of the greatest cities of the world is now completely shattered

Today all the outer city is peasant wilderness, with scattered remnants of stone or brick structure. Near the Tungabhadra River are the grandeur ruins: palaces and stables, a royal bath, a temple with clusters of musical stone columns that can still be played, a broken aqueduct, the leaning granite pillars of what must have been a bridge across the river ... and at the other end a miracle : a temple that for some reason was spared destruction four hundred year ago, is still whole, and is still used for worship. (*India* 14-15)



V.S. Naipaul finds that though Government has declared some of the ruins of Vijayanagar as national monuments, people come to visit Vijayanagar because for them the surrounding destruction is like proof of the virtue of the old magic

Just as the fantasy of past splendour is accommodated within an acceptance of present squalor. The once glorious avenue—not a national monument, were unpaved, is green-black slurry of mud and excrement, through which the sandaled pilgrims unheedingly pad to the food stalls and souvenir shops loud and gay with radios. And there are starved squatters with their starved animals in the ruins, the broken stone facades patched up with mud and rocks, the doorways stripped of the sculptures, which existed until recently. Life goes on, the past continues. After conquest and destruction the past simply reasserts itself. (*India* 15)

Naipaul feels that with the continuous wars and invasions India has suffered intellectual depletion. He writes

I began to wonder about the intellectual depletion that must have come to India with the invasions and conquests of the last thousand years. What happened in Vijayanagar happened in varying degrees, in other parts of the country. In the north ruin lies or ruin: Moslem ruin on Hindu ruin, Moslem on Moslem. In the history books, in the accounts of war and conquests and plunder, the intellectual depletion passes unnoticed, the lesser intellectual, life of a country whose contributions to civilization were made in the remote past. India absorbs and outlasts its conquerors, Indians say. But at Vijayanagar among the pilgrims I wondered whether intellectually for a thousand years India hadn't always retreated before its conquerors and whether in its period of

apparent revival, India hadn't only been making itself archaic again, intellectually smaller, always vulnerable. (*India* 17-18)

Naipaul feels that Indians have had such long periods of subjection that they have become passive. He comments that this time India is facing an internal crisis because Indians have not developed any institution of their own. They have borrowed every-thing from other lands without realising whether they meet the requirements of the country. Naipaul observes

The turbulence in India this time hasn't come from foreign invasion or conquest; it has been generated from within. India cannot respond in her own way, by a further retreat into archaism. Her borrowed institution has worked like borrowed institutions; but archaic India can provide no substitutes for press, parliament, and courts. The crisis of India is not only political or economic. The larger crisis is of a wounded old civilization that has at last become aware of its inadequacies and is without the intellectual means to move ahead. (*India* 18)

V.S. Naipaul perhaps believes that the Indian way of life, which is partly pastoral and partly religious, is not adequate enough to tackle the problems of the modern world. The scientific and technological revolution of this age has confused the Indians and they are unable to respond to these new developments. Naipaul gives the example of Jagan, the main protagonist of R.K. Narayan's novel *The Vendor of Sweets*. The world of Jagan is like a house of clay which crashes down when his son returns from America with a

half-Korean and half-American wife. Jagan is unable to face the reality. His world collapses, when he realises that his son has a desire to break the age-old traditions and wants to begin his life on a new pattern. Jagan's life is disturbed by the intrusion of alien elements in his life. Naipaul passes an ironical comment on the plight of Jagan

Jagan's is the ultimate Hindu retreat, because it is a retreat from a world that is known to have broken down at last. It is a retreat, literally, to a wilderness where 'the edge, of reality itself was beginning to blur'; not a return to a purer Aryan past, as Jagan might imagine, but a retreat from civilization and creativity, from rebirth and growth, to magic and incantation, a retrogression to an almost African night, the enduring primitivism of a place like the Congo, where even after the slave trading Arabs and the Belgians, the past is yearned for as, *le bon vieux temps de nos ancetres*. It is death of a civilization, the final corruption of Hinduism. (*India* 43)

Naipaul's judgement that India is incapable of facing difficulties, which are now raising their heads after independence, is not correct. According to Naipaul, Indians have always been used to masters so now when they have got the rein of their country in their own hands, they are not capable of bringing stability in their country. Naipaul's comments that the old equilibrium breeds passiveness amongst Indians and they try to escape from the problems of life, is also not wholly correct. It is also not fair on the part of Naipaul to assume that the old equilibrium is a typical Hindu philosophy of quietism. These situations of change occur everywhere and every country has

its own way of coping with it. It is also not proper to make R.K. Narayan's character a symbol and mouthpiece for the hour of crisis that has come over the nation. India has been capable of keeping up its spirit owing to its dynamism. R.K. Narayan is right in saying that 'India will go on' because India is capable of adjusting herself according to new circumstances. Indians are dynamic people and not static and Naipaul's judgement seems incorrect because it appears that he has overlooked the positive aspects, of India and has only penetrated deep into the negative aspects. Even Naipaul's account of Vijayanagar is a bit distorted. He has moulded and twisted the facts of history to suit his theories which he wants to propound about India. When he comes to the wonderful city of Vijayanagar then instead of describing the glorious side of Vijayanagar, he sets his eyes only on the seamy side of the city. He picks up the negative aspects suggested by slave markets, prostitutes and human sacrifice and ignores the past glory of Vijayanagar. He comments

Vijayanagar had its slave markets, its temple prostitutes. It encouraged the holy practice of suttee, whereby a widow burned herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, to achieve virtue, to secure the honour of her husband's family, and to cleanse that family of the sins of three generations. And Vijayanagar dealt in human sacrifice. (*India* 16)

Historians from world over who have visited Vijayanagar have written about its glory in a very appreciative manner. A famous historian Abdul Razzak from Central Asia has said

The city is seen that eye has not been seen nor ear hear of any place resembling it upon the whole earth. (Nehru 140)

A Portuguese traveller Peas has called this city, as large as Rome and very beautiful. It is full of charm and wonder with its innumerable lakes and waterways and fruit gardens. The chambers of the Vijayanagar were a mass of ivory with roses and lotuses carved at the top -

it is so rich and beautiful that you would hardly find anywhere another such. (Nehru 140)

Peas writes further about the king Krishna Deo Raya

He is the most feared and perfect king that could possible be, cheerful of disposition and very merry; he is one who seeks to honour foreigners and receives them kindly asking about all their affairs, whatever their condition may be. (Nehru 140)

Vijayanagar has always been termed as a city of wonder by various travellers to India because of its beautiful architectural buildings and the kings of Vijayanagar have been famous in history not only because they built gorgeous palaces and temples but also because they had proper drainage system at that time, Naipaul, however, overlooks all these facts and declares Vijayanagar an unworthy ruin of India.

Naipaul's claim that Hinduism of Vijayanagar flourished at the expense of exploitation of slaves and the prostitutes were a

regular feature of the temples, is nothing but a deliberate denial on his part to overlook the real glory of Vijayanagar. He says

The surrounding destruction is like proof of the virtue of old magic; just as the fantasy of past splendour is accommodated within a acceptance of present squalor. That once glorious avenue—not a national monument still permitted to live—is a slum. (*India* 15)

It seems that Naipaul is prejudiced against India and is bent on proving that places like Vijayanagar have contributed nothing to India. The writer feels that the story of the beauty and splendour of Vijayanagar is a forgotten tale and instead of digging the past, Indians should look towards the future. He remarks that India submits before its conqueror and retreats before them and in its period of apparent revival, India has not only made itself archaic but also intellectually it is becoming smaller and vulnerable and to justify his statement he gives the example of India's freedom struggle, he points out that freedom fighters of Indian nationalism evoke, the Indian past with a sense of pride. In the past, religion was intermingled with political awakening. However, there was nothing wrong with nationalists emphasizing the imperative necessity of recovering the rich heritage for inspiring people in the fight against foreign rule but for Naipaul there appears to be dichotomy between the glorious past and its growth in the present time

There always was a contradiction between the archaism of national pride and the promise of the new: the contradiction has at last cracked the civilization open. (*India* 18)

V.S. Naipaul considers that the crisis, which India has suffered during the emergency, is not only economic or political but also moral and spiritual. He finds that the Indians are unable to respond to the reality because for centuries they have been suppressed and have lived as slaves. He believes that India suffers from intellectual depletion and unless she shows the capability to take things in her stride with vigour and zest, no solution of her problems can be reached. According to Naipaul salvation lies in coming to grips with modernity. He claims that the Indians are not still mentally prepared to enter the modern world. Naipaul does not agree with R.K. Narayan who has a firm belief that India will go on forward irrespective of any difficulty. On the contrary, he like Nirad C. Chaudhary considers that India cannot face the challenges coming in its way after independence.

Naipaul gives the example of R.K. Narayan's novel *Mr. Sampath*. He considers Srinivas, the hero of the novel, to be representing the Indian attitude that India is eternal and will survive in spite of its problems and crises. Many dynasties rise and fall, cities are built and destroyed and the entire country goes down under the fire and sword of the invader but after every defeat India again revives itself. Naipaul says the Indians are indifferent to India. Every man is an island and like Srinivas hardly care for anything even though the world may be breaking into pieces under his nose. To V.S. Naipaul the attitude which Srinivas reveals in the novel *Mr. Sampath* is a part of a Hindu response

to the world. Naipaul feels that Srinivas's attitude is a typical Indian attitude offering an enduring security. Ironically Naipaul says

Only India, with its great past, its civilization, its philosophy, and its almost holy poverty, offered this truth; India was the truth. So, to Indians, India could as detach itself from the rest of the world. The world could be divided into India and non-India. And India, for all its surface terrors, could be proclaimed, without disingenuousness or cruelty, as perfect. Not only by pauper, but also by prince. (*India* 33)

V.S. Naipaul points out that this attitude of quietism and our retreat into the philosophy of the past has been the backbone of our life. He finds the classic exposition of the Hindu equilibrium surviving the shocks of life quite unpalatable. He criticises Srinivas, the hero of R.K. Narayan's novel, for his passive approach to life and remarks that this quietism is not only of an individual character but of each and every man of India. He comments

Out of the sentimental conviction that India is eternal and forever revives, there comes not a fear of further defeat and destruction, but an indifference to it. India will somehow look after itself, the individual is freed of all responsibility. (*India* 33)

Naipaul feels that the Indians evade responsibility and their quietism is a proof of their religious response of endurance to worldly defeat. He says that the Hindus believe that the world is carefully balanced and is well looked after by the gods. He comments regarding the beliefs of Hindus



That we in this life are for what we have done in past lives so that everything we see is just and balance, and the distress we see is to be relished as religious theatre, a reminder of our duty to ourselves, our future lives, spoils the entire country and instead of marching forward, India is retreating backwards. (*India* 33)

Naipaul feels that Indian people's attitude of quietism is parasitic. It depends on the continuing activity of others, the train's running, the post-arriving etc. It needs the world but it surrenders the organisation of the others. Naipaul in a tone of sadness comments that he is shocked to see the remarkable stoic indifference which Indians show even after experiencing great suffering. In the section *An old Equilibrium of India : A wounded civilization* Naipaul comments that without the religious attitude of Indians their suffering would have been insupportable. He gives an example from a Bihar village where the residents have completely surrendered themselves to their fate and have accepted poverty and suffering as their destiny

Generation followed generation quickly here, men as easily replaceable as their huts of grass and mud and matting (golden when new, quickly weathering to grey-black). Cruelty no longer had a meaning; it was life itself. Men knew what they were born to. Everyman knew his caste, his place; each group lived in its own immemorably in designed area; and the periahs, the Scavengers, lived at the end of the village. (*India* 28)

Naipaul says that Indians have made a willing compromise with the distresses of life. He even claim that the westerners who come to India in search of mental peace are misdirected. Naipaul says that the

Hippies of the western Europe and the United States have become tired of their civilization and come over to India in the hope of discovering a new world for themselves where their tired body and brain will be soothed. Naipaul observes that their search is an act of misadventure

The hippies of Western Europe and the United States appear to have done so; but they haven't. Out of security and mental lassitude, and intellectual anorexia, they simply cultivate squalor. And their calm can easily turn to panic. When the price of oil rises and economics tremble at home, they clean up and bolt. Theirs is a shallow narcissism; they break just at that point where the Hindu begins; the knowledge of the abyss, the acceptance of distress as the condition of men. (*India* 27)

It is an accepted fact that the Indians are prone to philosophical speculations which makes them accept their suffering stoically as something destined by God. Naipaul, however, fails to understand and appreciate the religious faith of Indians as he himself is a rootless writer and without any religious faith. He is guided by the rationalism of the west and this leaning towards rationalism makes him sceptical of and sometimes antipathetic to the religious attitudes of others. His antipathy to religion is so overwhelming that he sees the salvation of India in rank modernization. This attraction for modernization makes V.S. Naipaul look upon the life of the Indians as void and meaningless. Naipaul brutally condemns the Indians for their complacent attitude. He writes



All the chivalry of Rajasthan had been reduced here to nothing. The palace was empty; the petty wars of princes had been absorbed into legend and could no longer be dated. All that remained was what the visitor could see; small, poor fields ragged men, huts, monsoon mud. But in the very abjectness lay security where the world had shrunk, and ideas of human possibility had become extinct, the world could be seen as complete. Men had retreated to their last impregnable defences; their knowledge of who they were, their caste, their karma, their unshakable place in the scheme of things; and this knowledge was like their knowledge of the seasons, Rituals marked the passage of each day, rituals marked every stage of a man's life. Life itself had been turned to ritual; and everything beyond this complete and sanctified world—where fulfilment came so easily to a man or to a woman was vain and phantasmal. (*India* 32)

Naipaul feels that Indian life is a sluggish stream and an Indian is happy and satisfied living in the past. It appears that the Indians are living in a state of coma and their past and the mental stupor caused by it encompass them.

*In India - A wounded Civilization*, Naipaul rejects blinkers perspective of fantasies of spirituality, or a return to the village pastoral fantasy

History must be liberated from the fetters of a backward-looking nostalgia in the post-colonial context. Else India will remain entrenched in the fantasy of past splendour which is accommodated within the acceptance of present squalor. (*India* 15)

Naipaul finds that though in India there is an abundance of natural resources, the country is underdeveloped and poor because of large-scale corruption prevailing in the country. Naipaul ascribes the saddening state of affairs prevailing in the country to our propensity of not calling a spade a spade. There is an incurable tendency in us to conceal our inaction in the guise of philosophical rationalism. Indians do not accept the responsibility; they try to evade it. Naipaul rightly finds fault with the Hindu morality of self and self-realization and considers it as a great stumbling block in the impending national progress. He writes

The heritage is there, and will always be India's; but it can be seen now to belong to the past, to be part of the classical world. And the heritage has oppressed : Hinduism hasn't been good enough for the millions. It has exposed us to a thousand years of defeat and stagnation. It has given men no idea of a contract with other men, no idea of the state. It has enslaved one quarter of the population and always left the whole fragmented and vulnerable. Its philosophy of withdrawal has diminished men intellectually and not equipped them to respond to challenge; it has stifled growth. So that again and again in India history has repeated itself; vulnerability defeat, withdrawal. (*India* 53)

Even the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru has expressed similar idea in his book, *The Discovery of India*. He has mentioned that exaltation of the Hindu morality of self and self-realization is responsible for the impairment caused to social fabric

That very individualism led them to attach little importance to the social aspect of man, of man's duty to society, for each person life was divided and fixed up, a bundle of duties and responsibilities within his narrow sphere in the graded hierarchy. He had no duty to, or conception of society, as a whole, and no attempt was made by him to feel his solidarity with it. (Nehru 61)

Naipaul states that for the Hindus the world is an illusion. This conception of the world being illusionary breeds passiveness, inaction and a willing surrender to beneficent God. Naipaul points out that Hinduism begets the shattering despair

Kingdoms, empires, projects like the commissioner's; they had come and gone. The monuments of ambition and restlessness littered the land, so many of them abandoned or destroyed, so many unfinished, the work of dynasties, suddenly supplanted. India taught the vanity of all action, and the visitor could be appalled by the waste and by all that now appeared to threaten the commissioner's enterprise. (*India* 32-33)

Naipaul finds that in every sphere of an Indian's life, inaction is found and this lack of action is also seen in V.S. Naipaul's account of the ruler of a princely state. His comments on the life-style and the attitude of the prince is very close to the truth

The princes of India—their number and variety reflecting to a large extent the chaos that had come to the country with the break-up of the Mughal Empire—had lost real power in the British time. Through generations of idle servitude they had grown to specialize only in style. (*India* 33)

During his course of the tour, Naipaul meets a prince who has become an energetic entrepreneur after the abolition of privy purse and titles. He has become a successful businessman, but he laments the loss of his titles and his power. He informs Naipaul

Now they've looted my honour, my privilege. I'm nobody. I'm just like every body else....Earlier I had power of life and death. But I can still go out and walk. Nobody's going to try to kill me like Kennedy....I am not a patriot but I'm an Indian. (*India* 34)

Naipaul finds that all the sayings of the prince are false: he is just making tall claims, because in reality he has ruled like a dictator and is an autocrat.

Naipaul sarcastically describes the prince who comes down drunk to a teetotal dinner. His dress of chiffon is stuck with roses. Although the prince is indifferent and arrogant he tries to discuss Indian democracy seriously and wants to prove himself a true nationalist. He tells Naipaul

India needed Indian forms of government; India wasn't one country, but hundreds of little countries. (*India* 34)

Naipaul very cleverly makes out that the prince has been discussing democracy for his own gain and has been building up the cause for his own autocratic rule, Naipaul mildly rebukes the prince when he keeps on boasting about his still commanding love and affection of the poor who he ruled over in an autocratic manner.

Naipaul further points that India's firm faith in religion has had a negative effect on India and has blocked its way towards modernization. He points out that near the palace of the prince, at some distance, there is a small insignificant temple. It has a great relevance for the people and though the temple tank has overgrown with moss and the water has become muddy, people from far and near come to worship. Naipaul remarks that though religious life is a part and parcel of the life of the Indian people and has provided them some sort of equilibrium, it has also exercised a negative influence.

The negative effect, which arises from the false sense of security in the lives of Indian people generated by over-religious attitude, is an obstacle in their way to modernization. Naipaul has critically examined two most popular novels of India, *Mr. Sampath* and *The Vendor of Sweets* by R.K. Narayan to reveal the wrong with the Indian psyche. The protagonists of both the novels, Jagan and Srinivas, venture into the world of action but finally withdraw themselves. The hero Srinivas of *Mr. Sampath* believes according to Naipaul in

rebirth and growth as a cleansing, a recurrent Indian miracle, brought about only the exercise of self-knowledge. (*India* 41)

Naipaul proves his point by citing examples. He reveals that though India was facing emergency imposed by Mrs. Gandhi in 1975, people of India were not concerned with the fate of the country.

Naipaul is not incorrect and his attack on India is out of genuine concern for India. He finds that the Indians are too indifferent; they are not concerned about their country and he points out that the zest and vigour that Hinduism manifested in its pristine glory during the days of the Vedas and the Upanishads has become a matter of mere ritual. Naipaul's criticism of Hinduism is on the count of this degeneration of Hinduism into a creed of quietism

Where ritual regulates the will and so much of behaviour is ceremonial, all gestures are important one, gesture of rebellion....Rejection of Karma. Such a fragile world, where rebellion is so easy, a mere abandoning of ritual ! It is as though the Hindu equilibrium required a world as small as restricting as that of Narayan's early novels, where men could never grow, talked much and did little, and were fundamentally obedient, content to be ruled in all things by others. As soon as that world expands, it shatters. (*India* 42)

Naipaul observes that not only the non-doing attitude of Indians is a hurdle in the way to modernization but also the idea of individual perfection is stopping Indians to move forward. It is written in the Upanishads that "there is nothing higher than the person". Even the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru has commented on this attitude of Indians

The emphasis on individualism, or exclusiveness or graded castes is much more evident in India. In latter ages it was to grow into a very prison for the mind of our people not only for the lower castes, who suffered most from it, but for the higher ones also. Throughout our history it was a weakening



factor, and one might perhaps say that along with the growth of rigidity in the caste system grew rigidity of mind, and the creative energy of race faded away. (Nehru 61)

Naipaul wholly agrees with the view and finds that people who had fought for independence, had some cherished goals at hand during the struggle but after that the cherished goals for which independence was fought for receded into the background. Those who occupied power at the dawn of independence are responsible for this state of affairs. He comments

A multitude of Jagans, new to responsibility but with no idea of the state—businessmen, money-hoarding but always pious; politicians, Gandhi-capped and Gandhi garbed—had worked to undo that independence. Now the Jagans had begun to be rejected, and India was discovering that it had ceased to be Gandhian....Now of Gandhianism there remained only the emblems and the energy; and the energy had turned malignant. India needed a new code, but it had none. (*India* 46)

Naipaul is a detached and impartial observer and he also turns his searching eyes towards the widespread violence in India, he points out

there was an older, deeper Indian violence. This violence had remained untouched by foreign rule and had survived Gandhi. It had become a part of the Hindu social order, and there was a stage at which it became invisible, disappearing in the general distress. But now, with the Emergency, the emphasis was on reform, and on the "weaker sections" of society and the stories the censored news papers played up seemed at

times to come from another age. A boy seized by a village, money-lender for an unpaid debt of 150 rupees, fifteen dollars and used as a slave for four years; in September, in Vellore in the south, untouchables forced to leave their village after their huts had been fenced in by caste Hindus and their well polluted; in October, in a village in Gujarat in the west, a campaign of terror against untouchables rebelling against forced labour and plundering of their crops; the custom, among the untouchables men of northern district, of selling their wives to Delhi brothels to pay off small debts to their caste landlords. (*India* 47)

These violent incidents reveal the dark and awful side of India. Naipaul points out that violence is not a temporary aspect of Indian civilization. It has got a long ancestry in the book of Indian History. This violence has remained untouched by foreign rule; it has also outlasted Gandhi. It is part of Hindu social order. The condition of untouchables has always been worse in Indian society. Even the ancient Aryans discarded the untouchable and kept them out of society. Although Mahatma Gandhi tried his best to bring them in the mainstream of Indian society, Naipaul points people still practise untouchability in the villages.

According to Naipaul the attitude of the Indians of glorifying their past is gradually ruining their country. Sleeping in the lap of the past will breed inactivity in the Indians. He further says that as in modern times problems are becoming more complex, the methods of the past cannot be applied as they can hardly provide any remedy. He says that the Indians will have to reject the age-old belief that no

matter what happens, India will take care of itself. The Indians will have to make a firm determination to bring about major changes and will have to work unitedly for the welfare of the country. Naipaul appreciates modern writer Tendulkar who, in his play *The Vultures* has depicted the rejection of the entrenched attitudes. He suggests in the play

The loss of one kind of restraint quickly leads to the unravelling of the whole system and purity is possible only to the man who holds himself aloof; for Tendulkar there is no pure past, and religion can provide no retreat. (*India* 49)

According to Naipaul *The Vultures* is a much more realistic portrayal of the conflicts of India's society—more cruel and overwhelming than that of R.K. Narayan's *The Vender of Sweets*. Naipaul states that in this modern age problems have to be accepted as problems and a change will have to be brought about in our attitudes

India is learning new ways of seeing and feeling (p. 48) the millions are on the move. The poor have ceased to be background. Another way of looking was felt to be needed, some profounder acknowledgement of the people of the streets. (*India* 117)

There are stirring and occasionally such stirrings find expression in violence. The struggle between the old and new continues. Groups like Shiva-Sena and the Naxalites have been formed. These groups are trying to bring about revolutionary change in the society

and according to Naipaul the main problem that modern India has to fight against is that of population which has increased tremendously. The millions who have multiplied and have all flocked to the cities require the basic necessities for living. Naipaul impartially describes an urban phenomenon which like Parkinson's law is going to destroy the system if it fails to meet their basic requirements

The regarded millions have multiplied and now, flooding into the cities, cannot be denied. The illegal hutments in which they live are knocked down, but they rise again, a daily tide wrack on the margin of cities and besides the railway lines and the industrial highways. It was this new nearness of the millions, this unknown India on the move, together with the triviality of Indian thoughts on most subjects—the intellectual deficiencies of the archaic civilization finally revealed during this emergency. Indian stalled, unable to see its way ahead, to absorb and render creative the changes it has at last generated. (*India* 59-60)

Naipaul describes the pathetic conditions of the people living in Bombay Chawl

The chawl blocks are four or five storied high, and the plan is the same on each floor: single rooms opening on to central corridor, at the back of which are lavatories and facilities. Indian people ramify, and there might be eight people in a room; and "corners" might be rented out, as in Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg, or floor space; or people might sleep in shifts. A chawl room is only a base; chawl life is lived in the open, in the areas between chawls on the pavements in the streets. An equivalent crowd in a colder climate might be less oppressive, might be more

dispersed and shut away. But this Bombay crowd never quite disperses.  
(*India* 60-61)

The people living in these areas are craving for a separate identity and for this they have tried to connect themselves with Shiva Sena which claims to be an army of Shiva – not God – but the seventeenth century Maratha leader Shivaji, son of Jijabai, who fought bravely against the Muslims. Naipaul impartially observes Shiva Sena and reveals both negative as well as positive aspects of Shiva Sena. He does not approve of the Shiva-Sainiks claim that Maharashtra is for Marathas

The sena 'army' is xenophobic. It says that Maharashtra, the land of the Marathas, is for the Maharashtrians. It has won a concession from the government that eighty per cent of jobs shall be held by Maharashtrians. The Government feels that anyone who has lived in Bombay or Maharashtra for fifteen years ought to be considered a Maharashtrian. But the Sena says no: a Maharashtrian is some one born of Maharashtrians parents. Because of its xenophobia its persecution in its early days of South Indian settlers in Bombay and because of the theatricality of its leader, a failed cartoonist who is said to admire Hitler, The Sena is often described as 'fascist' (*India* 62)

However, on the other hand, Naipaul finds it a positive movement and comments

The Sena, like other recent movements in India, though more positive than most – infinitely more positive, for instance than the Anand Marg. The way of peace, now banned which preached caste Hindu spiritually, and power through violence, all of this mingled with ritual murder and

mutilation and with homosexuality (desirable recruits were sometimes persuaded that they had been girls in previous lives) the Sena is a great contracting out, not from India but from a Hindu system, which in the conditions of today, in the conditions of Industrial Bombay has at last been felt to be inadequate. It is in part a reworking of the Hindu system. Men do not accept chaos: they ceaselessly seek to remake their world, they reach out for such ideas as are accessible and fit their need. (*India* 63)

Naipaul also discovers in the Shiva-Sainiks the redeeming feature of their striving for an identity in a society which is insensitive to their aspirations

Identity there was no problem; it was a discovery. Identity was what the young man of the Sena were reaching out to, with the simplicities of their politics and their hero figures (the seventeenth century Shivaji, warrior chieftain turned to war god, the twentieth century Dr. Ambedkar untouchable now only in his sanctity). For the senemen, and the people they led, the world was new; they saw themselves at the beginning of things: unaccommodated men making a claim on their land for the first time, and out of chaos evolving their own philosophy of community and self-help. For them the past was dead; they had left it behind in the villages. (*India* 71-72)

After describing the pathetic plight of the people living in metropolitan cities, Naipaul also observes minutely the village life of India and gives expression to his impressions about it. In the chapter entitled The House of Grain Naipaul reveals the hypocrisy of village sarpanch who was the chairman of the village panchayat near Poona.

This man was enjoying a luxurious life at the cost of villagers. Naipaul describes in ironical tone that the sarpanch had collected money for a co-operative irrigation scheme but the money simply vanished and none of the villagers questioned about it and the most ironical part of this incident was that after this episode the Sarpanch gained more power and was envied as a prospering racketeer

Naipaul also describes a Patel, a man of property, and through his description reveals the bitter truth about the village life. Naipaul comments that powerful people like sarpanch and Patel are responsible for making the life of villagers hell. He gives a realistic account of the bad impact of people like Patel and Sarpanch

All the way from Poona — except in certain defence areas — it was dotted with sodden little clusters of African-like huts: the encampments of people in flight from the villages, people who had been squeezed out and have nowhere else to go, except here, near the highway, close to the towns, exchanging nullity for nullity; people fleeing not only from landlessness but also from tyranny, the rule in a thousand villages of men like the Patel and the Sarpanch. (*India* 89)

During the course of his journey to the villages he realises that in the country side, the problem of the landlessness is responsible for the major killings and riots. In some part of Central and North Western India villagers take to the ravines and gullies and become dacoits, outlaws and brigands. Naipaul points out that in Bengal, in the North East and in the South the Naxalite movement rose up as a tragic

attempt to gain land from the landowner. This movement gained its name from the place Naxalbari, a small district in far North of Bengal, where land was seized and landowners were killed but the areas of revolt were surrounded by the army and severely policed. The movement crumbled. Naipaul's evaluation of the Naxalite movement is quite correct when he says that this movement was a failure because it did not enlist the support of the tea-workers who were suffering and he claims that even the place Naxalbari was chosen not because the workers wanted to improve the condition of the suffering tea-workers but because it was secluded place and was a forest area. Naipaul says that seeing all these points one can easily make out that the revolution as unrelated to the peasantry and so it was bound to fail. He states

Naxalism was an intellectual tragedy, a tragedy of idealism, ignorance and mimicry; middle-class India, after the Gandhian upheaval, incapable of generating ideas and institutions of its own, needing constantly in the modern world to be inducted into the art, science and ideas of other civilizations, not always understanding the consequences, and this time borrowing something deadly, somebody else's idea of revolution. (*India* 93)

Naipaul states that Naxalite movement crumbled because it was not a spontaneous uprising and was not locally led: it was organized by communists from outside.



V.S. Naipaul is a rigorous social analyst and very deeply he probes into the problem of India. He states

The poor are no longer the occasion for sentiment or holy alms-giving; land reform is no longer a matter for the religious conscience. Just as Gandhi, towards the end of his life was isolated from the political movement he had made real, so what until now has passed for politics and leadership in independent India has been left behind by the uncontrollable millions. (*India* 93)

This comment clearly reveals his capacity for understanding the problems India is facing and whatever Naipaul says about India and its people springs from his first hand acquaintance with the cross sections of the Indian people in varied walks of life. His observations, based on real encounters, have a validity of their own. He appeals to the Indians to view their past in a new light

So, in all the distress of India (now a fact of life, and immutable), protest looks back to the past, to what is thought to have violated, what is known to be lost. Like childhood, this golden Indian past is not to be possessed by inquiry; it is only to be ecstatically contemplated. The past is a religious idea, clouding intellect and painful perception, numbering distress in bad times. (*India* 149)

Naipaul tells that people should come out of their past and should not try to evade the modern problems by escaping into their past which they consider idyllic. Naipaul just wants that the Indians should open their eyes and clearly visualize their past.

Naipaul has both admiration and apathy for Mahatma Gandhi. He finds Gandhi admirable because he waged a war for twenty years in South Africa against ignominy meted out to the Indians there and threw his heart and soul into the struggle for securing honour and dignity for them. Naipaul feels that Gandhi was at fault because he did not properly develop the racial feeling amongst the Indians required for the maintenance of the unity of the nation. The result is that often riots take place in India because people do not feel that they belong to one nation. Gandhi himself realized his failure during the communal riots which took place at the dawn of the independence.

Naipaul also condemns Gandhi for developing a fantasy of village republic in a civilization, which is being changed beyond recognition by scientific technology of a great magnitude. But in spite of finding all these faults in Gandhi, Naipaul also admires him a lot. He states

What was new about him then was not the semi-religious nature of his politics; that was in the Indian tradition. What made him new was the nature of the battles he had fought in South Africa. And what was most revolutionary and un-Indian about him was what he left unexpressed and what perhaps, as an Indian, he had no means of expressing: his racial sense, the sense of belonging to a people specifically of the Indian sub-continent, that the twenty years in South Africa had taught him. (*India* 154)

Naipaul feels that Gandhi was mainly

a racial leader fighting racial battles; and it was as a racial leader that he returned to India, an oddity among the established politicians, to whom 'Indian' was only a word, each man with his own regional or caste power base. (*India* 155)

Naipaul feels that Gandhi should have developed the feeling of Indianness amongst the Indians and if he had done so he would have escaped facing the communal riots which rocked India during pre and post independence periods. Naipaul wants the Indians to accept their shortcomings and stop singing praises on the splendour of their past. He comments

The racial sense is alien to Indians, Race is something they detect about others, but among themselves they know only the sub castes or caste, the clan, the gens, the language group. Beyond that they cannot go; they do not see themselves as belonging to an Indian race, the words have no meaning. Historically, this absence of cohesiveness has been the calamity of India. (*India* 154)

Naipaul observes that Indians are concerned only about their particular clans or castes, religions or sects and are loyal only to themselves. Owing to this attitude of the Indians there are widespread scenes of militancy and revolution all over India. People care for their gains and no one is interested in India. Naipaul observes that Indians

are small-town men, provincials, and they remain small because their power is based on the loyalties of caste and region. The idea of all-India is not always within their grasp. They have spoken instead, since the 1960s only

of India's need for 'emotional integration' and the very words speak of fracture. The racial sense which contains respect for the individual and even that concept of 'the people' remains as remote from India as ever. So that even Marxism tends to be only its jargon, a form of mimicry: 'the people' so often turn out to be people of a certain region and of a certain caste, (*India* 159)

Naipaul also feels that the approach of the Indians in dealing with the modern problem is not correct. He says that eminent Indians like Gandhi, Vivekanand, Vinoba Bhave and Mr. Narayan laid emphasis on the past and while dealing with problems of poverty try to find solution in the past. According to him, Gandhi's exhortation to "return to village" and gain self sufficiency is not going to solve the modern problems. Gandhi's teachings will not enable the Indians to cope with the fast developments taking place in the field of education and science. Returning to pastoral life is impossible. We will have to find modern solution for modern problems. Naipaul considers that Vinoba Bhave's work of land-redistribution is not going to solve the problem of modern man of India. It is a sheer waste of time and Naipaul's criticism of Bhave's methods is legitimate; the substitution of spirituality for the machinery of the state. It tied in with Bhave's avowed Gandhian aim of seeing the state 'wither away' India released by Gandhi from subjection, was now to regenerate itself by the same spiritual means. (*India* 164)

Though on the outer level it may seem to us that Naipaul is a stern critic of India, the land of his forefathers, if we probe deeply we

will realise that Naipaul has a genuine concern for India and he is himself in a dilemma whether to accept or reject India. He keeps on visiting India because no matter how much he may try to maintain a distance with India but she still attracts him.

Naipaul's *India: A wounded civilization* deals not only with Naipaul's criticism of India but also shows his concern for India. Naipaul suggests that the age-old faith that India would regenerate itself and look after herself by clinging to the past was to be rejected and to be replaced by a conscious desire to initiate change and to deviate all energies towards it. He has minutely observed the short-comings of India and puts forward a practical solution for them:

While India tries to go back to an idea of its past, it will not possess that past or be enriched by it ....The past has to be seen to be dead; or the past will kill ....The stability of Gandhian India was illusion; and India will not be stable again for a long time. But in the present uncertainty and emptiness there is the possibility of a true new beginning of the emergence in India of mind, after the long spiritual night. (*India* 174)

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## CHAPTER - IV

## JOURNEY INTO THE LAND OF THE FAITHFUL

V.S. Naipaul's *Among the Believers* is subtitled *An Islamic Journey* and this travelogue reveals his interest in Muslim countries and Islam. Naipaul undertook journey to four Muslim countries from August 1979 to February 1981. The four respective countries he visited were Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. Explaining the impulse behind this journey, Naipaul writes

The idea of travelling to certain muslim countries has come to me the previous winter, during the Iranian revolution. I was in Connecticut, and on some evenings I watched the television news. As interesting to me as the events in Iran were the Iranians in the United States who were interviewed on some of the programmes. (*Believers* 16)

Naipaul found a curious, and interesting contrast between the sophisticated westernised selves of the Iranians and the enthusiasm they revealed for the Islamic revolution. One student spoke of the beauty of Islamic law and Naipaul sarcastically comments

But what was he doing, studying law in an American University? What had attracted these Iranians to the United States and the civilization it represented? Couldn't they say? The attraction existed; it was more than a need for education and skills. But the attraction was'nt admitted; and in that attraction, too humiliating for an old and proud people to admit

there lay disturbance — expressed in dandysim, mimicry, boasting, and rejection. (*Believers* 17)

It is not that Naipaul's curiosity in Muslims was instantly awakened, he had some elementary ideas about them and to satisfy his curiosity he wanted to know more. He had developed these elementary ideas about Muslims during the course of living his life till the age of eighteen in Trinidad, though the contact was a limited one. He himself states

My own background was Hindu, and I grew up with the knowledge that muslims, though ancestrally of India and therefore like ourselves in many ways were different. (*Believers* 15)

Though Naipaul's background is that of a Hindu he has no bigotry in him. This enables him to impartially examine his experience of the Muslim countries.

Naipaul does not have animosity against any religious faith; his concept of the world is a pluralistic one in which people of different religions have equal right to exist. He is a man who loves studying human nature and has a desire to delve deep into the working of the human mind. His knowledge about Islam is limited. What he knows about Islam is known to everyone outside. Naipaul himself states

What I knew about Islam was what was known to everyone on the outside. They have a prophet and a Book; they believed in one God and disliked images; they had an idea of heaven and hell — always a difficult idea for me,



they had their own martyrs. Once a year mimic mousolea were wheeled through the streets; men 'danced' with heavy crescent moons, swinging the moons now one way, now the other; drums beat, and sometimes there were ritual stick fights. (*Believers* 15)

About his eagerness to know about these Islamic rituals, Naipaul has written

The stick-fights were a mimicry of an old battle, but the procession was one of mourning, commemorating defeat in that battle. Where had that battle taken place? What was the cause? As a child, I never asked; and it was only later that I got to know that the occasion – in which Hindus as well as Muslims took part – was essentially a Shia occasion, that the battle had to do with the succession of the prophet, that it had been fought in Iraq, and that the man especially mourned was the Prophet's grand son. (*Believers* 15-16)

Naipaul considers himself a seeker, a man who is interested in knowing more and more about the difference of human-behaviour placed in different circumstances. After reading *Among the Believers* one has an impression that Naipaul has leaned in favour of the adversaries of the Muslims he writes about, however, this is not a correct assessment because he does not raise his eyebrows against anyone. He is an observer of the social and political milieu with blinkers off his eyes so that his vision may not be blurred. Though he has settled down in the United Kingdom, he is not bound to that country. He has personal opinions and personal likes and dislikes and



he judges the Islamic countries according to his own understanding. Naipaul has once again stated in an interview in 1971

As you grow older, you understand people a lot more; you have greater sympathy with people; you enter into them much more. (Shenker 53)

*Among The Believers* is undoubtedly the work of such an older, mellower man. Naipaul was forty seven when he wrote *Among The Believers* and so it is a gentle book and there are many moments that catch the author in mood of reverie and almost poetic longing, something very rare indeed in Naipaul. There are many friendships forged and quite a gallery of individual portraits in this book.

The first Islamic country which Naipaul visits is Iran. He reaches Iran in the month of August in 1979. It was Ramazan, the Muslim fasting month : it was Friday, the Sabbath, however, Naipaul finds that the atmosphere of the country is not wholly religious. He finds that the people are disillusioned and frustrated all over the country and this was a result of the change of government which had taken place under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. A war had been waged against the Shah. The Shah regime was replaced by the rule of Muslim clergy. The change of government has left a bitter trail in its wake because the ouster of the Shah had been effected by bloodshed. Naipaul describes the city of Tehran, regarded as one of the exquisite places, to be shattered and torn by violence. North Tehran which was once the most elegant part of the city with parks, plane-lined boulevards, hotels,

expensive apartment blocks, now appears to be in a state of boil and desperation. Naipaul gives a pathetic picture of the city

On this tree lined shopping avenue, in that burnt-out building (it's blackened window openings not noticeable at first in the fume stained street), the Shah's soldiers had taken up their position. They had fired on demonstrators. And here, in this doorway, a man had died. After six months the blood was barely visible : just dark specks on the dirty concrete....On revolution avenue....some booksellers had books in Persian about the revolution, its ideologues and its martyrs. And there were photography albums of the revolution. The emphasis was on death, blood and revenge. There were photographs of people killed during the Shah's time; photograph of the uprising; blood in the streets, bodies in the morgues, with slogans, daubed in blood on the white tiles; galleries of people executed after the revolution, and shown dead, page after page, corpse upon corpse. One corpse was that of Hoveyda, the Shah's prime minister, hurried out to death late one night by the Khalkhali's orders and shot twice, first in the neck, then in the head; and the black bullet hole in Hoveyda's old man's neck was clear in the photograph. (*Believers* 60-61)

Naipaul himself has an opportunity to witness a scene on Revolution Avenue near the University of Tehran where he finds clashes. He states

But violence was in the air, and just after we came out through the main gate we saw this incident. A student in a white shirt, small and with glasses, inexpertly and with some comic effort taped a leaflet on to iron rails of the gate. The leaflet was a protest about the closing down of Ayandegan, the paper of the left. A workman near a food stall at the edge of the

pavement walked slowly over, drew a red hammer and sickle on the leaflet, crossed the whole sheet with an X, slapped the student twice, in the middle of the pavement crowd, and then, without hurry, taped up the defaced leaflet more securely. (*Believers* 61)

Naipaul feels that it is praise-worthy to bind people into unity but the kind of unity which Ayocallah Talequani was trying to impose is not very proper because he was using prayers as a demonstration of revolutionary unity, unity as, was found in the days of the Prophet and the desert tribes. The Ayatollah was in reality indirectly forcing people to shed their personal identity. The Ayatollah through the microphone asked for chants from the seated multitude. And again and again the responses came drowning the amplification from the loudspeakers. The chants were about unity, union, facelessness, in an immense human coagulation. Naipaul feels that people are surrendering their individualism and becoming faceless.

In Iran Naipaul is disillusioned by the facelessness of the revolution. This facelessness is the result of playing on the religious sentiments of people. Naipaul finds an example of this on the glass font door of the Tehran Hilton International in the allegorical painting of blood and revenge

In the foreground there was a flat landscape: a flat, featureless land bisected by a straight black road, marked down the middle by a broken white line. On this road a veiled woman, seen from the back lay half-Collapsed, using her last strength to lift up her child as if to heaven.

The women had a bloodied back; there was blood on the black road. Out of the blood higher up the road, giant red tulips had grown, breaking-up the heavy the heavy crust of the black road with the white markings; and above the tulips, in the sky, was the face of Khomeini, the saviour frowning, Khomeini saved and avenged. But the tulips he had called up from the blood of martyrs had damaged the modern road(so carefully rendered by the artist) for good; that road in the wilderness now led nowhere. (*Believers* 27-28)

Naipaul finds that individuality was allowed only to the avenger. The wounded woman who represents the common people of Iran is faceless. Naipaul comments that individualism has to be surrendered to saviour and the avenger.

Naipaul finds the revolution ironical because he feels that Iranians who were fighting against the Shah's regime are gradually making Ayatollah Khomeini a despot, who is becoming the nucleus of everything in the Iranian's life. Misgivings arise in Naipaul's mind when he finds the sanctity or authority of Ayatollah Khomeini becoming absolute. Naipaul finds that through the position an power of the Ayatollah is not defined in the constitution he supersedes every one and is the prime mover. Ayatollah has gained such a powerful position in Iran that he is now regarded as the interpreter of God's will on earth. The walls of Tehran are full of Khomeini's posters representing him with a religious halo, a symbol of divine power.

Naipaul, during his trip to Iran is unable to understand how Ayatollah Khomeini will find an answer to the political problems. Behzad, his guide and interpreter, puts forward this dilemma when he says

Nothing has changed for them. So for the third time in this century the people of Iran have been broken.....seventy years ago we wanted to get rid of the Quajar king. We got a constitution then. But it was never carried out. That was the first time we were broken. The second time was in 1953, when we wanted to get rid of the Pehalvis who replaced the Quajars. The American coup d'etal broke everything. And now for the third time you see what's happening. A revolution and then nothing....they are going to call it Islamic. That's all. (*Believers* 387).

Naipaul feels that on the surface the Iranian revolution appears to be the collective will of people with no contradictions. Looking beneath the surface he finds that there are clashes and differences of opinion among the Iranians. The revolutionaries are divided into two groups, the leftists drawing inspirations from Lenin and Stalin and the Revolutionary Guards inspired by the fanaticism of Khomeini. Naipaul's guide and interpreter Behzad is a communist who is not concerned with the religious orthodoxy of the fundamentalists. He is son of a teacher in Persian literature. His father has instilled in him the ideas of Marx. The Revolutionary Guards are very wild and militant and they even close down the left Journal Ayandegan and throw out all the occupants from the premises. They behave as dictators and even do not spare the artists and poets. They deface all the inscriptions from the

author of Shahnama. The revolutionaries erase all the pre-Islamic Iranian motifs from his tomb because Firdausi was against the imposition of Arabic culture on Persia.

During the course of his stay in Iran, Naipaul finds that the protagonists of the revolution make a rejection of the West. They claim that the west is sick. It is paradoxical that on the one hand Iranians condemn the West, on the other they can not do away with the comforts which are the products of the technological civilization of our times. In his visit to the holy city of Qom he reads a book entitled *The West Is Sick* in which Muslim clergy brutally condemn the West. Naipaul attacks their hypocrisy by pointing out that they cannot even do without western products

Certain modern goods and tools — cars, radios, television — were necessary; their possession was part of a proper Islamic pride. But these things were not associated with any particular faith or civilization; they had thought of as the stock of some great Universal Bazaar. (*Believers* 35)

Naipaul detects that something has gone wrong with the champions of the revolution. He finds that the Ayatollahs are very careful and want to uphold their position at any cost. He finds that during the holy month of Ramazan, the Ayatollahs disperse all over Iran to keep an eye on their power so that no outsider may make an intrusion into their domain. Naipaul finds that there is a constant inner war going on in the society because the Ayatollahs are not just religious guides

and are not just engaged in purely religious pursuits. They crave for power and for this, they have taken the help of religion.

Naipaul feels that the main tragedy of Iran lies in the fact that the religion that was worked up by the sublime and grandiloquent rhetoric of the clergy was not given a concrete shape in institutions. The Muslim clergy had made high sounding sentences about the birth of the society of believers representing all the goodness of Islam of the seventh century A.D. But they could not put it into practice and only after a year Naipaul finds that the picture of ideal society projected by clergymen was broken and that the society of Iran was shattered. Naipaul finds that out of that society had not come law and institutions; these things were as far away as ever. The society had brought anarchy and hysteria. To his surprise, Naipaul finds that people who had earlier hailed the Khomeini's government are now disillusioned with it.

Naipaul had met two Iranians during his course of journey. Parvez and Jaffery, both were connected with "The Tehran Times". They were over-joyed when Khomeini acquired power but very soon their hopes were shattered. They had thought that the society of believers would solve all the ills prevailing in the society but that society of believers proved to be a damp squib. Naipaul is amazed at the sudden closure of the journal *The Message Of Peace*, which was full of the rightness of the faith and the wrongness of everything else. Papers like *Iran Week* and *Tehran Times* which had earlier glorified the



rule of Ayatollah Khomeini were now shrunk and Pervez of *Tehran Times* who had hailed the rule of Khomeini was confused

So deep down, he was divided. With one part of his mind he was for the faith, and opposed to all that stood outside it; in a world grown strange, he wished to continue to belong to himself for as long as possible. With another part of his mind he recognised the world outside as paramount part of the future of his sons. It was in that division of the mind — as much as in the excesses of the Shah — that the Islamic revolution had begun in Iran. And it was there that it was ending. (*Believers* 398-399)

Naipaul builds up his conclusion by saying that whatever life has come to Iran and whatever money has flown in, it is just a result of oil and not politics. Naipaul seems to suggest that it is material prosperity that keeps Iran moving not Islam

The people that had come to Islam had not come from within. It had come from outside events and circumstances, the spread of the Universal civilization. It was the late twentieth century that had made Islam revolutionary, given new meaning to old Islamic ideas of equality and union shaken up static or retarded societies. It was the late twentieth century and not the faith — that could supply the answer in institutions, legislation, economic systems. (*Believers* 398-399)

Naipaul gives an example of the hypocrisy of the Iranians by quoting a story from a novel *Feri*. It is the story of an Iranian woman who has studied in the U.S., married an American University teacher and works as a biologist in a research institute. Going to

Iran for a short holiday, she decides to stay on after coming into contact with a U.S. trained Iranian doctor who had preferred to return to his native land. Naipaul's comment on this decision is:

It is as if *feri* and the doctor, turning away from a life of intellect and endeavour, have come together in an Iranian death pact. In the emotion of their Shia religion, so particular to them they will rediscover their self-esteem and wholeness and be inviolate. And life will go on. Other people in spiritually barren lands will continue to produce the equipment the doctor is so proud of possessing and the medical journals he is proud of reading. (*Believers* 19)

Naipaul mocks at the Iranians because even though they depend on the West they try to negate its contribution and reject it. Naipaul finds that Iran depends on the west for idea, education, medical equipment, study material etc. but still does not want to give any credit to the West. Naipaul ironically comments that Iranians are caught in a dilemma and are unable to decide where they should tilt, whether towards the acquired way of life or the traditional one. Naipaul had formed a vague idea about Iran from a novel *Feri* but to his surprise, he sees everywhere evidence that confirms the views which he had formed. Naipaul concludes his section on Iran by commenting on what most Iranians believe

The civilization (western) could'nt be mastered. It was to be rejected; at the same time it was to be depended on. (*Believers* 398)

After rejecting Iran and declaring it a country without any hope, Naipaul embarks upon a journey to Pakistan which is also an Islamic state like Iran but Naipaul finds a vast difference between these two countries. He comments with regard to these countries

The Iranian state was disintegrating. The outsider could make the connection. But the man of faith could juggle with these great events and keep one separate from the other and even while he prepared to run he could continue to rejoice at the victory for Islam. Pakistan could be contemplated in the same way. It could be seen as a fragmented country economically stagnant, despotically ruled, with its gifted people close to hysteria. But Pakistan was also the country that had been founded more than thirty years before as a homeland for the Muslims of India and for that reason was to be cherished as a pioneer of the Islamic revival. (*Believers* 82)

Both countries were associated with each other because of their common religion. Naipaul quotes an article from Tehran Times which shows how people of Iran and Pakistan have been linked with each other

The history of Pakistan and the Islamic Revolution in Iran is a reminder of the power of religion and the hollowness of secular cults. How the world works is the concern of science. And how society is to be governed is the affair of politicians, but what the whole thing means is the main concern of Iran and Pakistan. Politics is combined with religion in Islam, Iran and Pakistan can join hands to prove to the world that Islam is not just faith of the past, practising ancient rituals. (*Believers* 82)

V.S. Naipaul remarks that both these countries are in the throes of interchangeable revolutions. Islam sanctified rage – rage about the faith, political rage; one could be like the other. Naipaul feels that though both the countries were undergoing major religious and political changes but revolution in these two countries had a peculiar flavour of its own. He points out the difference between these two

Iran was a land of oil and money here desert was desert. Iran, with a population of 35 million earned 70 million dollars a day from its oil. Pakistan, with twice the population, earned 140 millions a month from its exports of rice, leather and cotton .... Pakistan, in a year could spend only 20 million dollars on the roads of Sind province which was vast. Iran could write off billions in military equipment – oil turned to money to water; here it was news that Pakistan was approaching Iran for a loan of 150 million dollars. (*Believers* 83)

Thus after reading this excerpt one can easily make out the difference between these two countries. Iran can behave in an extravagant manner while Pakistan with its limited economy can not do so. In Iran the ever-growing income from oil keeps the flame of Islam burning but in the Pakistan it is poverty that acts as a faggot feeding the flame of Islamisation. Naipaul remarks

In Iran you felt, in spite of all that was said about the wickedness of the Shah, that the money had gone down far, money, and the foreign goods and tools that it brought gave an illusion of Islamic power, 70 million unearned dollars a day kept the idle country on the boil, and fed the idea of the revolution. In Pakistan poverty had the same effect. The tension of poverty and political distress merged with the tensions of the faith.

Thirty two years after its founding as a religious state, an Indian Muslim homeland, Pakistan remained on the boil, and Islam was still an issue : failure led back again and again to the assertion of the faith. (*Believers* 85)

Naipaul comments that it is a strange fact that administration of the state of Pakistan has collapsed but faith has not. If one glances at the history of Pakistan, one is bound to find that its history is of uprootings and mass-migration. After its founding in 1947 Pakistan has been considered a country where Islam has been victorious but this land of faith has gradually turned into a land of plunder. Regional groups have started raising their heads. Army rule has been imposed so many times but Bengali Muslims have been successful in separating Bangladesh from Pakistan. One of the most blood chilling experience in Pakistan has been the brutal hanging of Mr. Bhutto by Zia-ul Haq. This incident has further lowered the position of Pakistan in the eyes of the world and has demoralised and further divided the country. Naipaul is himself shocked to hear the stories fabricated after Bhutto's death

In the Jail in Lahore — I had been told — they had put him in a cell where the cruel summer sun fell for much of the day. He asked for his drinking water to be boiled; they brought him a vacuum flask of boiling water; it was evening before the water was cool enough for him to drink .... At every stage of his legal degradation the quality of his food declined. (*Believers* 91)

Naipaul tries to probe deep into the maladies afflicting Pakistan. He asks if faith has been responsible for linking the country why has the contrary happened ? Why has it further divided the nation? To find this answer, Naipaul tries to peep into the history of Pakistan from the period of Mohan-jo-daro and even tries to find out the long-lasting effects which are a result of Arab invasion of Sind and links it with the present history of Pakistan. Naipaul feels sad at the fact that Pakistanis have tried to distort history. They had just tried to justify their religion. They hold that before Prophet Mohammad there was darkness and after that there has been only light. Naipaul wonders as if this can be really true.

Naipaul is shocked to find that although Pakistan has been going through very hard times, but no one has tried to impartially view the situation, for them Islamic faith was more important

The State withered, but faith did'nt. Failure only led back to the faith. The state had been founded as a homeland for Muslims. If the state failed, it was'nt because the dream was flawed, or the faith flawed; it could only be because men had failed the faith. A purer and purer faith began to be called for. And in that quest of the Islamic absolute — the society of believers, where every action was instinct with worship — men lost sight of the political founder, who (less philosophical than Iqbal) wanted only a state where Muslims would'nt be swamped by non Muslims. Even Iqbal was laid aside. Extraordinary claims began to be made for Pakistan : It was founded as the land of pure; it was to be the first truly Islamic state since the days of the Prophet and his close companion. (*Believer* 87)



Naipaul made his journey to Pakistan to deeply study the minds of people of that country. He makes an attempt at a reading of Islamic faith in the bigger perspective of history, history which has been bent to serve religion. Naipaul tries to find out the truth by freely mixing with people of Pakistan drawn from the varied strata of Pakistani society and then by peeping deeply into their inner feelings reaches the truth. He not only meets officials like Mr. Deen, Mr. Ahmad, Mr. Shervani and the Ahmadi lady civil servant working in a government department but he also meets non-officials like Mr. Mirza, one of the most affluent men of Pakistan. He also meets Pakistani lawyer Mr. Khalid Ishaq and one newspaper editor Mr. Sahabuddin, Naipaul meets a Shia doctor in Rawalpindi. He tries to view Pakistan in all its tints and shades and wants to inquire into what has gone wrong with Pakistan. He finds that the Ahmadis, a sect of Islam that believes in the reality of the promised messiah or Mohd have been declared outsiders are now considered heretics and they are now leading a life of persecution though they hold distinguished posts in army and business.

Naipaul feels that he would be giving an incomplete picture of Pakistan - a religious state if he does not describe the various sects of Islam and for this he visits Sufi-centres in the interior of Sind. Sufism is an offshoot of Islam like the sects of Shias and Ahmadis: Naipaul also describes the lifestyle of the tribals, he tries to give a



correct picture of Pakistan by observing each community residing over there.

Apart from observing the various social groups in Pakistan, Naipaul lashes out at the legal system of Pakistan in the section entitled "The Disorder Of the Law". In the company of Nusrat a journalist of *The Morning News* Naipaul goes to the sessions court at Karachi and the scene he finds over there is surprising. The courts have been based on Islamic ideals but the picture there was a blow to those ideals

And in all that bustle at the session court, in all the rooms Nusrat took me to, only one magistrate was sitting. In the little room, below the legal bench, there were two or three spectators or simply people waiting. The atmosphere was casual, and the gravity of the depressed looking man in the dock (blue shirt, loose Pakistani trousers) was slightly incongruous; he was like a man taking his role far too seriously. It was hard to know what was going on, people spoke loudly in Karachi; but in this little room they mumbled, and with the encircling hubbub it took some time to understand that they were speaking in English, it took longer to understand that it was case of theft, that after a year the police had still not produced witnesses, and that the case had been called only to be adjourned yet again. (*Believers* 149)

Naipaul finds that justice is denied to the needy and cases cannot be solved owing to lack of evidence. He finds that proceedings in the courts are conducted in a jestful fashion. He cites example to demonstrate the negligence of judges.



Naipaul finds an unveiled woman with a very thin son waiting for justice. Although she had all the papers which revealed that she had bought property for four thousand rupees but she was now facing trouble owing to that; she had been regularly coming for three days but the magistrate had been absent and even on the day Naipaul visited, the magistrate had not come. She was widow and had been suffering a lot and the episode itself reveals a lot about the functioning of the law courts.

Naipaul gives another example of two helpless women waiting for justice in the court

On a bench next to the balustrade of the verandah two peasant women sat, old mother, grown-up daughter .... In their patient feminine way they were waiting for someone to show an interest. They were people with a grievance and they had grown to love the legal atmosphere the court building was their wailing ground. (*Believers* 152)

But there was no one to care for their wails, people simply did not bother about them. During the course of the so-called court proceedings, Naipaul hears the muezzin's call, which undoubtedly is a sacred call involving self-purification and true devotion to God, but it is an irony that all holiness has been lost in the context of Pakistani legal system. In a sarcastic manner he comments

The government had decreed that government departments should cease work for these prayers. And in the courts, not especially active that

morning, the Azan seemed less a call to prayer than a signal to people who were not doing much to do absolutely nothing. (*Believers* 154)

Naipaul regrets at the poor conditions of law in Pakistan. He laments the fact that there is an injudicious mingling of religion and politics in Pakistan. He says that it is

Easy to state the Koranic punishment, it was another matter to work out law. (*Believers* 156)

Naipaul is of the opinion that what should weigh most with the law makers, is equity and justice and not a passive adherence to precedents found in the scriptures. Society is a living organism and is subject to change. So the objective of the law should be the will of people and the promotion of human happiness.

To work out law, with only the historical geographical and cultural (and sometimes folksy) particularities of the Koran as a guide, was to become entangled in textual religious-sectarian disputes of this kind, and very quickly to get away from the idea of equity. (*Believers* 156)

Naipaul gives an example to prove the hollowness of Pakistani legal system. He gives an account of a Pir, a holy man, who had raped a thirteen year old daughter of one of the disciples and the case cannot be decided because it is stated in the Islamic law that there should be four witnesses on the scene and due to lack of witnesses the Pir is roaming free. Naipaul states that the provision of four witnesses has its origin in the Koran where Allah has been shown intervening in



the case of Aisha and revealing to the prophet that Aisha was innocent and that four eye witnesses were needed to prove adultery. V.S. Naipaul and even *Pakistan Times* find fault with this law because such an act is never done in the open. Even this law is based on a misreading of the Koran. He says

The prophet's revelation was about 'lewdness and "feminine lewdness specifically". It can not require an ordinary witness and medical evidence might have been offered. (*Believers* 156)

Naipaul not only exposes the shortcomings of the legal system but he reveals that even the administration of Pakistan which is based on Islamic principles is also not working properly. He meets Mr. Deen, government information officer, and wants to inquire about experiments with Islam in Pakistan. Mr. Deen very enthusiastically speaks about Islamic experiments but Naipaul finds a contradiction in his speech and action and comments that the people who talk expect other people to do the work.

Mr. Deen calls Mr. Sherwani and explains that Naipaul wants to see Islam in action. Mr. Sherwani promptly replies that Naipaul should go through the translation of Marmaduke Pickthall; and learn about the philosophy of Islam but Naipaul's quest is different and he has come to Pakistan to view how the great principles of Islam have been embodied in political and economic institutions. He wants to know more about the banking system which is operated on the basic

principle of giving interest to the depositor and charging it from the borrower. Both the Government officials are unable to answer this and just suggest in a passive way that Naipaul should go to mosques or he should go to see the pilgrims bound for Macca in order to know the depth of Islamic faith.

To see the atmosphere in mosques of Pakistan, Naipaul goes with Mr. Sherwani to a mosque in Karachi and finds, to his amazement that like other mosques it is decorated with beautiful colourful lights and costly carpets. He finds that in the mosques prayers are chanted but as rituals. The mullah who chant the prayers chant them mechanically. Naipaul comments

Breathless recitations in Arabic from the koran - some of the mullahs showing off how well they knew the book, how fast they could recite how little they needed to draw breath - were followed by expositions in Urdu. (*Believers* 101)

Naipaul has not only described mosques and examined the religion of Muslims, he has also minutely observed the division of Islam between various sects. One such sect is that of the Ahmadis, which has been declared non-Muslim by Mr. Bhutto. The Ahmadis believe that Mohammad is not only the final prophet. They also believe in a messiah born in north India before the partition. Naipaul has almost devoted one whole section "The Salt Mills Of A Dream" to describe the faith of the Ahmadis who want to cleanse and restore

the purity of Islam. Naipaul goes on a journey to Rabwah on the bank of river Chenab near Lahore and closely observes the Ahmadis who have been termed heretics by the mullahs. Naipaul carefully draws a faithful picture of the Ahmadis living over there and records their humiliation, sufferings and beliefs very faithfully. He finds that Rabwah is a nice place but even there the Ahmadis are not safe. The Islamic government of Pakistan is persecuting the Ahmadis. Though Naipaul draws the picture of Ahmadis sympathetically but he also finds fault with them. The Ahmadi are too much concerned about after life and they hardly try to maintain themselves properly in this materialistic world which they consider transient.

Naipaul has also very ironically described people like Mr. Mirza who try to befool by pretending to be intoxicated with religion. Naipaul feels that Mr. Mirza is a simple mullah who believes that since Mr. Bhutto has been persecuted, he can again rise to power because of Islamic government in the country. Though he claims to be a purely religious man, there is an inherent desire in him to possess political power. Naipaul criticises the mullah for believing that they have the exclusive right to interpret Islam. Naipaul meets a Karachi based lawyer, Mr. Khalid Ishaq who also does not seem to appreciate the attitude of mullahs and criticises people like Mr. Mirza who know nothing about institutions. He says

The mullahs really had no idea what was being asked of them. They could only think of "The good man" or "the good men" to whom every thing

should be entrusted. I have met these people and I really think that many of them don't even begin to have an idea of the need for institutions of any kind. They don't know what we are talking about. (*Believers* 127)

Apart from describing the various sects of Pakistan Naipaul also comments on a steel project which had been named after Bin Qasim an Arab invader of Sind. He was a man who had slaughtered innumerable human beings but Pakistan has a steel plant named after him. Naipaul feels that a savage militarist like Bin Qasim who killed so many people cannot be matched with the great ideals of Islam on which Pakistan is being built. Naipaul describes that on the excavation of Banbhore many layers of human bones had been found

The bones weren't only on the surface; the excavation trenches showed the mixture of bones and earth all the way down, the bones like a kind of building materials. Had the town been built on a cemetery. (*Believers* 122)

Though it may seem to some readers of *Among The Believers* that Naipaul is prejudiced against Pakistan, in reality this is not true. Naipaul has very honestly and sympathetically portrayed Mr. Ahmad, a cosmopolitan person in outlook, and he has also shown the positive side of Pakistan through the Sufi centres Mr. Ahmad had been an officer in Indian navy before partition and after that he became an industrialist. He is tolerant person and has not forced any of his sons to imbibe any religious dogma. His firm belief is that one should serve humanity. In his young age, he has lived very loosely but he himself says that with age his attitude has been changed and

unlike other Pakistanis he does not believe that the world has begun in 1947 when Pakistan was created. In a romantic vein he tells Naipaul that he belongs to the original pre-Aryan race of Sind and he does not even condemn other religions of the past. He sees them as various stages of man's spiritual development. Mr. Ahmad believes firmly that true religion teaches unconditional service to humanity and he advises Naipaul to go to the Sufi centre hundred miles north to Hyderabad where Naipaul is himself touched to see that the inmates really devote their life to the service of poor people. The Sufi centre is a haven for poor people

It was crowded and close inside. People were sleeping on the worn marble floor. They had come from far, and for the poor there was no other place to stay; wretched of the desert, of those scattered poor fields and villages beside the Indus, people for whom the shrine — and all the shrines that had stood here, even before Islam, between the river and the shattered hill range of rock — had always provided shelter and comfort. (*Believers* 138)

Naipaul himself feels much pleased to see the centre and draws a contrast with the decorated, illuminated mosques of Karachi and Iran. He finds that though the mosques are ornate and ostentatious, they lack human warmth and affection whereas the plain Sufi-centre has the warmth of fellow feeling and charity. It is a haven for poor where Islam can really be said to have been put in action.

During the course of his journey to Pakistan, Naipaul feels Mr. Mohammad Iqbal who had first given the idea of Pakistan believed that the people of the new independent state would form their institution in consonance with Islam but the tragedy, Naipaul feels lies in the fact that political leaders of Pakistan have been unable to do so. Naipaul is not critical of Islam, he only criticises people who, in the name of Islam develop a creed that is a by-product of their selfish designs.

After observing Pakistan and finding that Islamic government is turning out to be a failure, Naipaul embarks on a travel to Malaysia which is situated in South East Asia, Naipaul finds a lot of contrast between Pakistan and Malaysia. He says that Islamic revivalism is there in Malaysia too but in a subdued way. Naipaul points out that Islam was not forcibly spread in Malaysia. The people who were responsible for spreading Islam in Malaysia were mainly merchants and priests who had come to Malaysia in 14th and 15th century. Naipaul begins his travelogue on Malaysia by contrasting between conversion done under force and conversion without any bullying or blackmailing. People of Malaysia willingly embraced Islam and were not forced by anyone to do so. Naipaul describes

Islam went to south-east Asia as another religion of India. There was no Arab invasion, as in Sind; no systemic slaughter of the local warrior caste, no planting of Arab military colonies; no sharing out of loot; no sending back of treasure and slaves to a caliph in Iraq or Syria; no tribute, no taxes on



Unbelievers. There was no calamity, no overnight abrogation of a settled world order. Islam spread as an idea — a prophet a divine revelation, heaven and hell, a divinely sanctioned code — and mingled with other ideas. (*Believers* 212)

The new religion appealed to the people of Malaysia because it had come in a relatively peaceful fashion. At first it seems that Naipaul is obsessed with the spread of Islam in Malaysia but this is not the whole truth; the Malaysian travelogue of Naipaul has a complex character. The complexity arises from the fact that there are layers of cultural strains in Malaysia. The first strain is Paganism, an animistic cultural strain, the second is the Hindu/Buddhistic strain in which the life of Malays is deeply involved; the third is the coming of Islam into the Malay life and the other influences are those of the Portuguese, British and Chinese. Thus it can be said that Malaysia has a cultural diversity.

Malaysia not only possesses cultural diversity but it also has a lot of political and geographical diversity. On one hand, one can find ultra modern cities like Kuala Lumpur and Penang and on the other hand one can see Malay kanpangs living in the lap of nature. Naipaul tries to draw a faithful picture by capturing all these cultural and geographical diversities in his travelogue.

Naipaul reveals that though Malaysia is officially a Muslim country with Muslim laws dominating, one does not find the unflagging

religious frenzy that Islamization has engendered in Iran and Pakistan. Naipaul is of the view that Pakistan has been created out of a pernicious hate campaign towards Hindus. Even the person who first gave the idea of Pakistan, Mohammad Iqbal, has said so because he believed that Muslim, needed a homeland where they would have a proper consumption of religion and politics. According to him both of them were bound with each other. This is not the case with Malaysia where cultural diversity can be found.

Naipaul finds that Malaysia has a mixed population of Malays Chinese, Indians and others. At the time of independence, Malays were 53% whereas Chinese and Indians were 36 and 11 per cent respectively. During the formation of government, the Malaysian government itself created a feeling of division amongst its people by favouring the Malays. Malays were given preference and the government adopted many measures to bring them to the economic level of the Chinese. As Malays were lagging behind in many fields, encouragement was given to them.

Naipaul observes that of the major three communities, the Chinese are the most advanced and they are occupying major positions in the field of trade, education and civil service. The tragedy of the Chinese, however, lies in the fact that though economically they are well off, politically they stand nowhere. They have been shut out from political power. Naipaul comments

The Chinese have advanced it is their energy and talent that keeps the place going. The Chinese are shut out from political power Malays rule, the country is officially Muslim, with Muslim personal laws; sexual relations between Muslims and non-Muslim are illegal, and there is a kind of prying religious police. Legal discrimination against non-Muslim are outrageous. But the Malawho rule are established, or of old or royal families who crossed over into the new world some generations ago. (*Believers* 214)

The main motive of Malaysian government in doing so is that it does not want the Chinese to gain power in Malaysia and the result is race-riots which are frequent. Naipaul refers to one of the most bloody race-riots, immediately after the elections of 1969, in which many lives were lost and more than two thousand Chinese were killed.

Naipaul finds that these race-riots and other disturbances in the country are due to the fact that Malaysian government wants to keep the members of other communities permanently subjugated. Though the Indians and the Chinese have been living in Malaysia for about nearly hundred years, they are treated as foreigners and the Malays have intense hatred for Chinese and Indians especially. Naipaul describes one such riot in which many Hindu idols in Temeriah were destroyed. Naipaul tells us about the fanatic faith of the Muslim youth-groups of Malaysia who had worked out

From various books they had consulted, how many thousands of years in paradise a Muslim earned for every idol he smashed; and they calculated



that a grand total of thirty smashed idols won a Muslim the jackpot, on eternity in Paradise. (*Believers* 246)

Naipaul points out that in Malaysia though

only half the population was Muslim; but everyone had to make his obeisance to Islam. The pressures came from below a movement of purification and cleaning, but also a racial movement. It made for a general nervousness. It made people hide from the visitor for fear that they might be betrayed. It led oddly, in this land of rain and steam and forest - to the atmosphere of the ideological state. (*Believers* 247)

Malaysian Muslims especially dislike the Chinese but they find it difficult to crush or harm them because they are economically strong and have their powerful societies. As Malaysian Muslims cannot harm them, they smash the Hindu idols because Hindus are a minority and do not have such a high status and power as the Chinese.

Naipaul comments that though the Malays constitute half of the population, they have the spirit of crusader and they are so overruled by fury that they do not shy of adopting ruthless measures for crushing people of other nationalities living with them in Malaysia. Naipaul tries to point out that Malaysia has progressed owing to the efforts of British Chinese and Indians.

The British develop the mines and the plantations. They brought in Chinese (the elegant, rootless peasants of a century back) and a lesser member of Indians to do the work the Malays could't do. Now the

British no longer rule. But the Malays are only half the population.  
(*Believers* 221)

Naipaul does not only deal with the relationship between Europeans and Malays like Joseph Conrad. He, however, frames his travelogues on a wide screen. He not only reveals the relationship of the Britishers and Malays but also informs about Chinese and Indians. After Independence Malays have become ruthless in their attitude towards other communities. They suffer from a feeling of loss. Naipaul observes

The new men of the villages, who feel they have already lost so much, find their path blocked at every turn. Money, development, education have awakened them only to the knowledge that the world is not like their village, that the world is not their own. Their rage—the rage of pastoral people with limited skills, limited money, and a limited groups of the world — is comprehensive, Now they have a weapon : Islam. It is their way of getting even with the world. It serves their grief, their feeling of inadequacy, their social rage and the racial hate. (*Believers* 214)

Naipaul dispassionately narrates the condition of Malaysia by encountering many people from different regions of Malaysia. The most prominent amongst them is Shafi who is a young man of thirty-two and hails from a village, Kota Baru, North-East of Malaysia. After completing his school Shafi had taken admission in college in Kuala Lumpur and there he became involved in politics. The riots of 1969 between Malays and Chinese had a long-lasting impact on his mind

and at the age of twenty-one, he came into contact with Anwar Ibrahim of ABIM, one of the most organised Muslim group of young people in Malaysia. Shafi had gone to the United States of America for a cultural exchange programme but he was not impressed by the glitter and glamour of America. He has come to the conclusion that the West is sick and regeneration lies only through Islam. He came back to Malaysia and though he took an executive post at a Malay constitution firm, very soon he resigned the post joined Anwar Ibrahim's ABIM as an active member.

The founder of ABIM Anwar Ibrahim is also a young man and he hails from Penang which is situated on the west coast of Malaysia. Naipaul finds that both Shafi and Anwar Ibrahim are from contrasting background one hail from a remote village while the other hails from a busy town, possessing all the luxuries of life. He has studied in reputed institution founded by Britishers and he felt dissatisfied because he found that religion as practised in the college was only matter of ritual, with no great meaning attached to it. He sought the help of a British teacher and studied intensely and then took to the preaching of Islam.

Anwar Ibrahim made an organisation ABIM and made Kuala Lumpur its headquarters. Anwar Ibrahim maintained contact with other Muslims movements abroad in Pakistan, Iran and Bangladesh. Anwar Ibrahim had been to Iran and there he had met Ayatollah



Khomeini. All this has greatly increased his reputation at home. He firmly held the belief that only Islam can help in regenerating Malaysia. This opinion is not only of Shafi and Anwar Ibrahim but Naipaul finds that other Malay people like a lawyer named Khairul and two teachers of university named Mohammad and Abdullah also share the same opinion they are staunch champions of Islam and do not have any regard for people holding other religious faiths.

Naipaul finds that some of the Malays are so prejudiced against other communities that they claim that village life is not Islamic, because there are many animistic Hindu traditions still prevalent over there. These people believe that the life-style of Malay villagers has to be altered and beliefs have to be purified and old pagan traditions of the village are to be uprooted. In a way they want to break age-old traditions which have enveloped the lives of Malaysian people for a very long time.

Naipaul also finds that some Malaysians also have different views about Islam. He meets people like Rahman who is of the view that in these days one cannot afford to follow each and every precept of Islam, and he tells Naipaul "you see, we are n't all going back to Islam." But the majority of Malaysians do not have this view. Even the young girls whom Shafi introduces to Naipaul have some grudge against the Chinese. These girls have been studying at ABIM for the last two years and they have come to this institution because they

have not done well enough in the government school. Naipaul finds that both of them are fed up with the academic education at the government school with science and technology as subject. At the ABIM school the main emphasis was on religion. The girl in pink informed Naipaul that one cannot run after materialistic things in life and spirituality and proper knowledge of religion is a must. Naipaul observes that though these girls have joined a religious institution, even then they are confused. They read short paperback light romances and are fond of Mills and Boon. One of them also loves light, delicious food. The girls are showing their interest in religion at the surface level but inwardly they are carving for a romantic life.

The girls are not only enveloped in the frenzy of Islamic passion but they also have racial and economic resentment. The girl in black says

The Chinese try to monopoly our economy..... we are left behind. It is not true what they say about Malays being lazy. We know it Isn't true but it hurts us to hear these things if we don't have the Chinese we could be a good business people. (*Believers* 237)

Naipaul finds that generally most of the Malay Muslims exhibit some kind of rage against the other communities and although Chinese have contributed a lot in making Malaysia a self-sufficient country, they are always looked down upon.





The hatred between the two groups is so strong that none of them can tolerate the other one. At the E and O Hotel in the city of Penang, Naipaul finds that there is a Chinese waiter who is very cordial and loving to Naipaul but to the other Malays he is too reserved. The Chinese also suffer from a sense of insecurity because the Malays are in favour of making Malaysia a purely Muslim country and for this they are making Islam their tool. After independence the Malay Muslims have changed the meaning of Islam so much that Naipaul calls it new Islam.

Naipaul points out that Islam in the beginning of the 15th century was not so rigid and it did not force the people of the land to give up their earlier faith and embrace Islam. However, new Islam has become very suffocating and has no sympathy or room for other religions.

Naipaul concludes that the main tragedy of Malay Muslims lies in the fact that though they want all the basic facilities provided by the West they are not willing to accept the West. Naipaul finds that people like Shafi are in a dilemma because on the one hand they crave for modernisation and on the other they also want to return to pure rustic life. Shafi wants that in his village school floors must be made smooth and there should be proper bus service and the whole village should be properly electrified. All these desires of Shafi reflect his intense craving for modern facilities. He, all the same, wants to reject the infrastructure of the Western civilization that makes for these



amenities of life. Shafi is full of praises for the purity of village life from which he has come to Kuala Lumpur but when Naipaul questions him whether he would like to go to village Shafi like the two girls, whom Naipaul had met at the ABIM seems confused. Naipaul ironically mocks at people of this sort who inwardly crave for modern facilities provided by the West but try to negate its reality. The main tragedy of the lives of these people, lies in the fact that for them other civilization and religion are incomplete but Islam is complete and nothing has to be altered in it. This thinking of theirs has brought a stagnation into their lives.

From Malaysia, Naipaul goes to Indonesia and he finds that there is a vast difference between the other Islamic countries and Indonesia because in other countries like Pakistan, Iran and Malaysia only Islam is recognised as a pure religion and other religions are looked down upon. Naipaul finds in Indonesia that people are not so orthodox as to champion the cause of Islam alone. The process of Islamisation is witnessed in post-independence Indonesia but Indonesia still have regard for other religious faiths.

Naipaul gives the example of an Indonesian man Suryadi born in East Java. Suryadi had been nourished by Hindu-Buddhist culture and he is not an orthodox Islamic person. Suryadi received a jolt and becomes very desolate when he finds that his own daughter has

got involved with an orthodox Muslim boy in the college and has decided to become an orthodox Muslim.

Suryadi's cheerful daughter has now started wearing a veil and though she is more educated than the person she has married, she has subordinated herself to her husband. Suryadi does not take to the idea of her becoming overnight a slave to an intelligence in abeyance. Naipaul comments that the change in the personality and ideology has not only come to the daughter but it is happening on a very wide scale to the Muslims in Indonesians. For people like Suryadi it is a painful process because all his life, he has been nourished by the traditions of the soil and now if someone tries to bring change in it he is sure to cause turmoil and disturbance in his life. Naipaul points out that Suryadi that has been nurtured by

A kind of Javenese culture....The Javenese dance and Javenese epics and puppet plays were part of his being. (*Believers* 283)

Naipaul unearths the history of Indonesia because without understanding its past one can never form an impartial picture of the country. In the beginning of the 14th and 15th century Indonesia was swept by the Hindu and Buddhist culture and after that by Islamic faith till the 15th century. The Dutch controlled Indonesia till the middle of 20th century and it was captured by the Japanese in 1942 who tried to erase all signs of Dutch culture from Indonesia.

They abolished the Dutch language overnight and they established the Sukarno government which ruled till 1965.

Naipaul tries to stress the point that since Indonesia has been subjected to many faiths and cultures, it actually possesses a composite culture. People of this land are not so fanatic about Islam as other countries. V.S. Naipaul's Indonesian travelogue is subdued and mellower in tone because he does not find Indonesians so fanatic about their religion and even though many riots have taken place in Indonesia, in general the people are not seized with rancour and hatred. Naipaul meets an Indonesian poet Sitor Situmrong who served a jail term for ten years from 1965 to 1975 and though he suffered a great deal, his attitude is humane and reflective.

Sitor had achieved political success during the Sukarno rule but he also suffered from identity crisis. He was unable to identify himself with his tribe. Even his parents were cut off from him because of his Dutch language. In Sitor, Naipaul describes the tragedy of a man who possessed his ancestral village, the valleys, the lake, the stone walls, the fairy tale houses but in the realm of ideas, he could not go any longer there. Sitor's tragedy is

He had been cut off from his past. He had gone to the Dutch school when he was six; he had been cleansed of village beliefs. For a writer, his early life had been oddly wordless; he had never had a conversation with his parents. (*Believers* 295)

Naipaul makes Sitor a symbol for revealing the changes which were gradually intruding themselves into the tribal life and are making tribals lose their sense of belonging.

In the chapter entitled "Deschooling" Naipaul takes the readers from the busy life of Metropolis to the interior of Java. He describes the life of the Javanese villagers vividly. Naipaul is guided by a nineteen year old student Prasogo a Javanese, and very keenly notices that Javanese society in villages is broadly divided into the class of the Wong Chilik representing common folks and the class of Raders meaning the nobles. One can easily distinguish between these classes by having a look at their dwellings : the nobles build houses, the dwellings of the poor have walls of bamboo and roofs of red tiles. Naipaul notices that the houses are like

Remnants of the architectural style of the last Hindu Kingdom of Java, Kingdom of Mejapahit, which disintegrated at the end of fifteenth century. (*Believers* 296)

The architectural style of villagers harks back to pre-Islamic past, a past which is not dead but which has successfully mingled into the lives of people. Naipaul describes a city named Indrapur— the name itself suggests the city of India's god Indra. In this village the legend of live Pandava brothers and the legend of the victory of ? Indra have been painted on the top of shops and houses. Now the five pandava brothers have become symbolic of five principles of Islam.

There is a world of difference between Malaysia and Indonesia. In Malaysia the Hindu-Buddhist heritage remained a matter of mere village customs while in Indonesia it has mingled into the Indonesian rhythm of life and has moulded it.

The people of the village of Java are aware about the epics of the Hindus; they have learnt it through the puppet shows. Naipaul describes the people of a village named Pranbanam where a famous Hindu temple is situated

The people of Pranbanam were in a quandary believing in the prophet and his paradise. But they did not feel they could say they were Muslims; they break too many of the rules. They knew that their ancestors had built the great nineteenth century temples of Pranbanam which people from all over the world now came to visit; and though they no longer fully understood the significance of the temples, they knew they were Hindu temples; they liked watching the puppet plays based on the Ramayan and the Mahabharat; and they knew that these were Hindu epics so the Pranbaran people felt they should declare themselves Hindus. (*Believers* 298)

Naipaul is full of admiration for Indonesia because in this country, he does not find the atmosphere choking because of the rigidity of Islamic faith as is the case of other Muslim countries like Pakistan, Malaysia and Iran. The most appreciative fact about Indonesia according to Naipaul, is that in this country other religions are not looked down upon. The Indonesian travelogue is also very relevant because in Indonesia, Naipaul meets a poet Sitor Situmorang

who is also an "exile" like Naipaul and both the writers suffer from a sense of being "lost". Sitor hails from a tribal background but finds that he shares nothing common with the tribals. He is unable to start with his autobiography as he is in a dilemma because "he had found that to write without an understanding of what he had come from was to do no more than record a sequence of events." (*Believers* 296). This statement reveals not only Sitor's frustration but throws a lot of light on Naipaul's dilemma since Naipaul is also an exile and like Sitor also made journeys to his ancestral land so that he might find his roots over there but both of them are disappointed in their search.

*Among the Believers* is encircled completely by the theme of loss which is projected through the various individuals — men and women whom Naipaul meets during the course of his journey. This travelogue is not only an interesting and impartial study of four major Muslim countries but it is rich in autobiographical asides because Naipaul finds many people sharing the same fate. Like him they are also lost and are searching for their centre. He sympathises with people like Nusrat who has decided to serve faith at every cost but all of a sudden finds herself all alone in the land of faith. Naipaul also feels sad for the Ahmadi civil servant girl whose sect is declared non-Muslim by the government. This has made her an exile in her own homeland. She is in a fix where to go since all her life she has considered Pakistan her motherland. Naipaul sympathises with Shafi in

Malaysia who grieves for the simple rustic life he has lost and his grievance is like that of Adam who has been expelled from paradise. Though he longs to go there, he is unable to do so and feels frustrated and trapped. For all these placeless people Naipaul feels genuine sympathy because they, like him, are searching for the centre of their being.



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## CHAPTER - V

### FINDING THE CENTRE

Since times immemorial man has had the craving to express his feelings and ideas in words or in action and lurking behind every creative work is the personality of the artist. V.S. Naipaul comments regarding this in his book *The Return of Eva Peron*

To take an interest in a writer's work is, for me, to take an interest in his life: One interest follows automatically on the other. (*Return* 212)

This is fairly a universal truth about literature. It seems humanly impossible to study a writer's work without taking an interest in the writer as a man. Literature reflects the trends and tendencies of an age but without the knowledge about the writer it is not easy to interpret his work. A writer's life is undoubtedly the key to a deeper understanding of his work. It is the writer who creates the world in which his characters have their existence – a world, which is often created out of conscious and unconscious memories of the world the writer has known in his childhood, adolescence and youth.

According to Naipaul a person goes to the work of his favourite writer because, as he states

It is I feel, a peculiar type of adventure – adventure with a mind, a sensibility that appeals to us .... we do not go for characters, or for language so much as for the writer himself. A writer stands or falls by

his sensibility and our assessment of his work depends on our response to his sensibility. (Landez 76)

In the work of every writer there are certain recognizable characteristics—a recurring image, idea or character type that reveals some deep impact made on the writer's mind by a deeply felt experience or event in his life. The environmental influences, both natural and those of family and society which shape a man's sensibility, are often identifiable in the peculiar traits of the writer's work.

A strong autobiographical element pervades all the works of Naipaul whether fiction or non-fiction. In his novels he reflects the various stages of his disillusionment with Trinidad, his despair with India and his concern with being a homeless ex-colonial. Whatever he says about other countries, their societies, about his own native island and about the Indian community there and what he portrays through artistic representation are so similar that the inter-relation of life and literature seems unavoidable. Naipaul is quite outspoken in expressing his thoughts. Naipaul's works have a marked socio-political context and his personal experience and outlook constitute the matrix of all his work.

Naipaul's *Finding the Center* occupies a very special place among his works. It is a beautiful blending of autobiography and travelogue. It consists of two personal narratives and both involve journeys.

The autobiographical snatch is made up of the six chapters of Prologue to an Autobiography and the travelogue is made of the remaining fourteen chapters of *The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro*. Though *Finding the Centre* is divided into two sections of autobiography and travelogue, the division is not watertight: both the sections complement each other and can be better understood in the context of each other. They together reveal a great deal about Naipaul as a man, writer and critic.

In the first Naipaul goes back to Trinidad, to his childhood, his family and particularly his father and also reveals the search of his roots as a writer. In the second, he describes his exploration of Black Africa and African magic on the Ivory coast and, in doing so, demonstrates how far his writing grows out of exposure to other people, and other states of mind. Naipaul himself has stated that both the two personal pieces ...

Are about the process of writing. Both pieces seek in different ways to admit the reader to that process. (*Center* 9)

Regarding the first chapter which is entitled Prologue to an Autobiography, Naipaul says, it is an account, with the understanding of middle age, of the writer's beginnings, (*Centre* 10) and about The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro he says

It is about ivory, cost. But the people I found, the people I was attracted to, were not unlike myself. They too were trying to find order

in their world, looking for the Centre, and my discovery of these people is as much part of the story as the unfolding of the West African background. (*Centre* 10)

*Finding the Centre* throws a lot of light on the creative process of Naipaul. He describes the making of his first book, *Miguel Street*. It is an irony of life that though Naipaul could never accept Trinidad as his home and rejecting it went to London to settle there, still he is indebted to Trinidad for providing him material for his first book. Naipaul had spent his childhood in Trinidad and whatever impressions were made on his mind at that time, have been portrayed in this book.

Naipaul reveals in the Author's Forward each and every aspect of his creative process. He reveals his attraction for common people which lead him towards non-fiction though his initial interest has been fiction. Naipaul states that at first he was hesitant to enter the field of non-fiction but gradually he became too involved in the work and also enjoyed it. Travel became his means and mode of examining the societies of the Third World. Since then Naipaul has travelled extensively and all his works have been an outcome of these journeys.

He comments in *Finding the Centre*

To travel was glamorous. But travel also made unsuspected demands on me as a man and a writer, and perhaps for that reason it soon became a necessary stimulus for me. It broadened my worldview; it showed me a changing world and took me out of my own colonial shell; it became the substitute for the mature social experience—the deepening knowledge of

society — which my background and the nature of my life denied me. My uncertainty my role withered; a role was not necessary. I recognised my own instincts as a traveller, and was content to be myself, to be what I had always been, a looker. And I learned to look in my own way ... To arrive at a place without knowing anyone there, and sometimes without an introduction, to learn how to move among strangers for a short time one could afford to be among them; to hold oneself in constant readiness for adventure or revelation; to allow oneself to be carried along, up to a point, by accidents, and consciously to follow up other impulses — that could be as creative and imaginative a procedure as the writing that came after. Travel of this sort became an intense experience for me. It used all the sides of my personality; I was always wound up. There were no rules. Every place visited was different; every place opened in a new way. Always at the beginning, there was the possibility of failure—of not finding any thing, not getting started on the chain of accidents and encounters. This gave a gambler's excitement to every arrival. My luck held; perhaps I made it hold. Always after the tension, there came a moment when a place began to clear up and certain incidents began to have meaning. (*Centre* 11-12)

In the Prologue to an Autobiography Naipaul has revealed his pain of being an exile—a rootless man. Naipaul has been robbed of a still centre and he is striving hard for something stable on which he can pin his faith. He belongs to two diverse worlds, the world of reason epitomised by the West and the world of unreason symbolised by Afro-Asian countries.

Though Naipaul was educated at Oxford and his mental bent is toward analytical reasoning, it cannot be denied that he has a fascination for the irrational. He wavers from one point to the other. His *Finding the Centre* is a very sensitive articulation of his personal dilemma in terms of the felt experience of life in Port of Spain where he had spent a major part of his childhood.

Port of Spain is a land which has mixed culture and for a sensitive man like Naipaul it is a treat to watch the society and feed his imagination. Characters like Bogart, who have a special role to play in Naipaul's early book, had their birth from the real life Bogart living near Naipaul's family in Port of Spain. Bogart is not only an important character but also is an integral part of his psyche. In Prologue to an Autobiography, he says

The connection of Bogart with my mother's family was unusual. At the turn of the Century Bogart's father and my mother's father had travelled out together from India as indentured immigrants. At some time during the long and frightening journey they had sworn a bond of brotherhood, that was the bond that was being honoured by their descendants. (*Centre*17)

Naipaul is fond of Bogart because Bogart disturbs his imagination at a time of great torment. The desolation which grips Naipaul during his stay at Chagunas, his mother's place also troubles Bogart who escapes from there to Venezuela but he soon realises that his quest had been futile. Naipaul is not like Bogart who seeks

refuge in religion. Naipaul rejects sheltered life, and states in Prologue to an Autobiography

After the shut-in compound life of the house in chagunas, I liked living on a city street. I liked looking at other people, other families. I liked the way things looked. In the morning shadows of houses and trees fell on the pavement opposite. (*Centre* 30-31)

In the Prologue to an Autobiography Naipaul has revealed a lot of his likes and dislikes of his childhood. He does not like the big house of Chagunas that provided stability to the inmates of the house and instead of admiring the closed and protected life at Chagunas, Naipaul likes to move into the emptier house in Port of Spain and the pleasures and sights of the city. He loves the squires, the gardeners, the children's playground, the street lights, the ships in harbour. This distinguishes him from his character Bogart because Naipaul craves to live life to the full.

The childhood memories of Trinidad haunt most of his novels. Although Naipaul rejected that country very early in his life. Trinidad has provided material for his early novel and his first book *Miquel Street* was written in 1955. Interestingly the stories, which make up the novel are all told by a boy narrator whose view of character changes as he grows and like Naipaul he leaves Trinidad for England on a scholarship.



In *Finding the Centre* Naipaul describes the making of his first book

Memory provided the material; city folklore as well and city songs. An item from a London evening paper (about a postman throwing away his letters) was used. My narrator consumed material and he seemed to be able to process every kind of material. (*Centre* 24)

Other stories generally reflect on various aspect of Creole society, illegitimacy, child and woman bashing and the unfulfilled longings of the characters to identify with alien models of success and achievement. Altogether the stories constitute a profoundly disturbing and distressing picture of Trinidadian urban society. It is a society of failures and a society in which

only a man's eccentricities can get him attention. It might also be that in a society without traditions, without patterns, every man finds it easier to be himself. (*Centre* 24)

Apart from describing the Trinidadian Society in the Prologue, Naipaul has also drawn a clear sketch of his childhood and above all his affection for his father. Besides describing the happy moments spent with his father, Naipaul also recalls a painful past incident connected with his father's life which he had come to know, years later through a news paper. His father had incurred the wrath of some Hindu fanatics and he was forced to atone by sacrificing a goat to the Goddess Kali. This humiliation made deep impact on his father's mind and for some time he almost lost his mental balance

and; 'He looked in the mirror one day and couldn't see himself. And he began to scream'. (*Centre* 70)

Naipaul admits that his father was shattered due to this incident and also justifies the title Sacrifices given by the French edition to *Finding the Centre*. He states that the French title refer to

not only ritual sacrifice not only the critical ambushes of the past, but also the theme of personal sacrifice, the writer's life, my father's life. (Gussow 45)

V.S. Naipaul is indebted to his father for instilling in him the ambition to be a writer. His father was himself a journalist and though at that time he was doing an unusual job for a Trinidad Indian of his generation. Naipaul states that his bond with his father was strengthened when they moved to the house in Port of Spain where his family shifted after his father was again taken on by The Guardian as a city reporter. Naipaul's father was the main inspiring force behind his literary works. His father introduced him to major English writers like Joseph Conrad and O.Henry who influenced Naipaul a lot. Apart from this Naipaul also got from his father something quite terrifying. It is what he calls the "all consuming fear of extinction". Naipaul also learnt lesson of stoic fortitude from his father. Naipaul was inspired greatly by O.Henry who was also a favourite writer of his father. Naipaul's father had read three stories of O.Henry to Naipaul : the first was the "Gift of a Magi" dealing with sacrifice, the

other dealt with a Tramp's life and the third was left unfinished, a story about a criminal who was about to be electrocuted.

O. Henry's own death also inspired Naipaul as his stories had. He states that unfinished story made an impression on me, as did the story of O. Henry's own death. He had asked for the light to be kept on and had spoken a line from a popular song : I don't want to go home in the dark. (*Centre 38*) Naipaul further says

To be a writer as O. Henry was, to die in mid-sentence, was to triumph over darkness. And like a wild religious faith that hardens in adversity this wish to be a writer, this refusal to be extinguished, this wish to seek at some future time for justice, strengthened as our conditions grew worse in the house on the street. (*Centre 38*)

For V.S. Naipaul writing was not just a profession. He makes art a weapon for fighting the despair and desolation of life. For him writing is something holy, something lofty and sublime. Naipaul states

The wish to be a writer didn't go with a wish or a need actually to write. It went only with the idea I had been given of the writer, a fantasy of nobility. It was something that lay ahead, and outside the life I knew—far from family and clan, city colony. Trinidad Guardian, Negroes. (*Centre 38*)

However Naipaul does not believe in divorcing literature from reality. He wants to beautifully blend fact with fiction. Though he keeps himself close to the dense pattern of life, his interest is not in

presenting a photocopy of life. He reserves the right of a creative writer to transmute the realities of life into a noble design. Although Naipaul had seen his father working as a city reporter for The Guardian, and that was his first idea of being a writer, he does not cast himself purely into the mould of a journalist.

Naipaul has inherited from his father the wonderful gift of blending fact with fiction. He is full of appreciation for the ineffable grace discernible in the stories of his father relating to the portrayal of life in Indian villages. Speaking about his father's story-writing Naipaul says

The people he wrote about were poor, but that was'n't the point. These stories celebrated elemental things, the order of the working day, the labour of the rice-fields, the lighting of the cooking fire in the half welled gallery of a thatched hut, the preparation and eating of food. There was very little 'story' in these stories. But to me they gave a beauty (which in a corner of my mind still endures like a fantasy of home) to the Indian village life I had never known. And when we went to the country to visit my father's own relations, who were the characters in these stories. It was like a fairytale come to life. (*Centre* 36)

Naipaul tells us in the Prologue that the most enjoyable phase of his childhood has been his two-year stay at Port of Spain. Naipaul calls it the most blissful time of his childhood. Very soon circumstances forced Naipaul's family to shift to a near by cocoa estate of thirty three acres in the hills to the north-west of Port of

Spain. The pain Naipaul feels on being cut off from the peaceful life of Port of Spain finds a powerful expression in Prologue to an Autobiography

After the quiet and order of our two years as a separate unit we were returned to the hubbub of the extended family and our scattered nonentity within it. (*Centre* 33-34)

The loss of tranquillity and stability forced Naipaul to embark on a quest for shelter through his creative imagination. Naipaul feels inspired by the sheer hard work of his father and his sense of dedication. His pursuit of art is a paradigm of all creative artists who make continuous effort for coming to grips with the full articulation of their vision.

Naipaul belongs to the category of writers who do not believe in imitating the previous writer but they try to invent a form. He did not have any model before him and therefore he himself speaks of his alertness in making a delicate adjustment between intuition and idea

So step by step, book by book, though seeking each time only to write another book, I eased myself into knowledge. To write was to learn. Beginning a book, I always felt I was in possession of all the facts about myself: at the end I was always surprised. The book before always turned out to have been written by a man with incomplete knowledge. And the very first, the one begun in the freelances, room seemed to have been written by an innocent, a man at the beginning of knowledge both

about himself and the writing career that had been his ambition from childhood. (*Centre* 27-28)

Naipaul reveals a lot about his writing in this account, he is a sort of writer who is conscious and very particular about the proper organisation of his experience. He reveals his admiration for Conrad and his style and it can be said without any prejudice that Naipaul's quest for form is in no way inferior or rigorous to Joseph Conrad's.

Naipaul's imagination is stirred by characters like Bogart and he tries to brood over myriad interrelated scenes of life. It is true of every creative writer's worth the name who begins with the "germ" but devises a form for the expression of the intuition in its various ramifications.

Naipaul's desire to see a particular scene of life in its variegated form arose perhaps from the disturbance and turmoil in his very psyche. He reveals his restlessness in the Prologue

And a problem for me was that my life had been varied, full of upheavals and moves: from my grandmother's Hindu house in the country, still close to the rituals and social ways of village India: to port of Spain, the Negro and G. I. Life of its streets the other, ordered life of my colonial English School, which was called "Queen Royal College"; and then Oxford, London and the freelances room at the BBC Trying to make a beginning as a writer, I didn't know where to focus. (*Centre* 26)

Naipaul tries to search for order and wholeness through his writings. Naipaul has a feeling that order and stability which come

from a settled conviction of life is absent from him when he begins writing stories and novels. In the Prologue he mourns the loss of a perspective of life

To be a writer, I thought, was to have the conviction that one could go on. I didn't have that conviction. (*Centre 25*)

In his attempt to give a definite shape to his different experiences, Naipaul comes to realize that the ways of writing are mysterious. He has the sincerity of an artist and he never allows the false pass for the real

The ways of my fantasy, the process of creation, remained mysterious to me for everything that was false or didn't work and had to be discarded. I felt I alone was responsible for everything that seemed right. I felt I had only been a vessel. There was the recurring element of luck, or so it seemed to me. True, and saving, knowledge of my subject—beginning with Bogart's street—always seemed to come during the writing (*Centre 25*)

In the Prologue to an Autobiography Naipaul has wonderfully captured his budding creative impulse in his first story. The story relating to Bogart is his maiden venture set in the freelancer's room of BBC in London. He feels that the room was the place where he had become sure of his creativity. Naipaul uses Bogart's life as a "germ" out of which he creates a wonderful story of people living on either side of the Miguel Street. Although Bogart was related to his family, he does not render any photographic representation of Bogart's life. He

places Bogart in a larger frame and surrounds him with many characters.

After a brief journey to his past Naipaul embarks upon his next journey to Ivory Coast—a land of cruelty, hypocrisy and malignancy. The first chapter of African travelogue entitled The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro is a gripping narrative of Naipaul's journey through Ivory Coast—an African country. Naipaul's works look like a travelogue but actually it is not so. In the chapter of The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro he reveals his intention

I travel to discover other states of mind. And for this intellectual adventure I go to places where people live restricted lives, it is because my curiosity is still dictated in part of my colonial Trinidad background. I go to places which, however alien connect in some way with what I already know... It is a writer's curiosity rather than an ethnographer's or journalist's so while, when I travel, I can move only according to what I find, I also live as it were, in a novel of my making, moving from not knowing to knowing, with person interweaving with person and incident opening out into incident. The intellectual adventure is also a human one: I can move only according to my sympathy. I don't force anything; there is no spokesman I have to see; no one I absolutely must interview. The kind of understanding I am looking for comes best through people I get to like. And in the Ivory Coast I moved in the main among expatriates white and black. I saw the country through them and through their varied experience. (Centre 87)

Naipaul begins his narrative by describing Yamoussoukro which is regarded as one of the wonders of Black Africa. He observes



that Yamoussoukro is an enchanting land, one of the wonders of the black Africa. He does not visit that land for its physical beauty, but because of his fascination for the people living in different circumstances. Through different characters possessing different identities clashing with one another, Naipaul brings out his central theme of The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro. The characters in this Travelogue are broadly divided into two groups: the first group consists of expatriates, white as well as black and in the other group of the natives of the ivory coast. The black expatriates residing in the coast whom Naipaul meets, are Arlette. Andree, Gil Sherman, Junior Busby and Janet. Arlette works in the Arts departments of University of Ivory Coast. She is a divorcee. She had fallen in love with an ivoirian man and married him. Andree is West Indian and works as secretary to Mr. Niangoranbouch, the director of the institute of Ethno-Sociology. Gil Sherman is a black American who works as an assistant to Terry, a public relations officer of the American Embassy, junior Busby, the son of Dr. Bushby and believes in dedication his life to the African cause. Janet is of Guianese descent and is a lovely and cheerful wife of Phillip. Apart from the black expatriates there are also whites expatriates like Terry Shrodor, who is a public relations officer and Phillip who works in inter state organization. The third white expatriate whom Naipaul meets is an American lawyer who works in an international law firm and is posted in Ivory Coast.



In the group of natives Naipaul has placed the President Houphouet Biogny of the Ivory Coast who has been ruling since 1960 and although Naipaul does not see him in person, he feels his presence all through "The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro". The President has done a lot to make his country rich and now, Naipaul states

that the land is so rich, that the Ivory Coast imports labour from its more depressed or chaotic African neighbours. Labour immigration as much as natural increase, has raised the population from three million in 1960 to nine million today. Abidjan the Capital begun unpromisingly on the black mud of fetid lagoon has become one of the biggest ports in West Africa. And one hundred and fifty miles inland, at the end of an auto route that would not disgrace France itself, the President's ancestral village of Yamoussoukro has been transformed. (*Centre* 75)

Apart from the President the other African characters about whom Naipaul is told are Amabon Hempate Ba – a, spiritual councillor to the President and Dr. Niangoron Bouch, who is very proud of being an African and is a specialist on black studies.

Naipaul finds Africa to be a land of contrasts: on the one hand the President is interested in modernizing Africa and on the other hand he maintains crocodiles and as a ritual gets them fed with live animals. To Naipaul the waking world dominated by the ideas of the white is half true in Ivory Coast. The truth which runs the roost in Africa is the truth of dark passions. The rational world is

represented by the expatriates and irrational is represented by black Africans and there is a great clash between these two. The world of dark passions is so powerful that there is a belief persistent amongst the Africans that in the face of the mighty possessions of the natives, the Europeans become insignificant and melt into nothingness

There was the world of the day; that was the white world. There was the world of the night; that was the African world, of spirits and magic and the true gods. And in that world ragged men, humiliated by day, were transformed – in their own eyes, and the eyes of their fellows– into kings sorcerers, herbalists, men in touch with the true forces of the earth and possessed of complete power. A king of the night, a slave by day, might be required at night never to exert himself; he would be taken about the his fellows in a litter...To the outsider, to the slave owner, the African night world might appear a mimic world, a child's world, a Carinval. But to the African—however much, in daylight, he appeared himself to mock it—it was the true world, it turned white men to phantoms and plantation life to an illusion. (*Centre* 136)

In the President's ancestral village of Yamoussoukro the reality of dark passions finds its embodiment in the crocodiles of the lake. The feeding of the crocodiles is a ritual, a tradition but none of the Africans whether expatriates or natives, are able to satisfy Naipaul's deep desire to know about the significance of crocodiles. Naipaul is a rationalist and is unable to attach any mystical aura to these crocodiles. To Naipaul some sort of twin reality existed at Yamoussoukro

The metropolis, the ruler's benefaction to his people, belonged to the world of the day, the world of doing and development. The Crocodile ritual—speaking of a power issuing to the President from the earth itself—was part

of the night, ceaselessly undoing the reality of the day. One idea worked against the other, so in spite of the expense, the labour, the ambition there was a contradiction in the modern paranoiac dream. (*Centre* 137)

### Naipaul ironically recreates the ritual of the feeding of the Crocodiles in the lake in chapter X

There were the president's crocodiles. They were to be fed at five ... In the lake on either side were the Crocodiles. We saw the first just as we left the car; barely noticeable in the muddy water, a mere protuberance of eyes, until its thorny back became clear. On one side of the causeway there was a stone-paved embankment sloping down to the water. On this embankment were a number of crocodiles, small ones, absolutely still, eyes bright and apparently unseeing, jaws open, the lower jaw of each crocodile showing only as a great hollow ... The tall feeder was now holding a black chicken by the wings. He swung the chicken slowly up and down. The squawks of alarm from the chicken died down... Then the chicken was thrown at the two old crocodiles. The open jaws snapped shut. The crowd gasped. But the feeder hadn't thrown straight; and the crocodiles hadn't moved. The stunned chicken fluttered its wings; it partly recovered from its stupor; it ran along to the end of the sandy bank, near the causeway ... The tall feeder in the flowered gown didn't allow the chicken to get away... A shout from the crowd told me that the chicken had been thrown. And when I turned I saw the bird turned to a feathery debris in the seemingly grinning maw of one crocodile, not the oldest, round unseeing eyes apparently alight with pleasure, black feathers sticking out on either side of the jaw. A moment's ingestion, and all was gone, except for a mash in the lower jaw. The ceremony was over. (*Centre* 134-135)



Naipaul contrasts this ritual feeding with that of the modern buildings of Yamoursukro which are built by foreigners. He comments

The metropolis of Yamoussoukro awaited full use. But it had been created by foreigners. It was something that had been imported and paid for; The new world existed in the mind of others. The skills could be learned, but faith in the new world was fragile. (*Centre* 136)

Naipaul feels

Something of this twin reality existed at Yamoussoukro. The metropolis, the ruler's benefaction to his people, belonged to the world of the day, the world of doing and development. The Crocodile ritual — speaking of a power issuing to the President from the earth itself — was part of the night, ceaselessly undoing the reality of the day, one idea worked against the other. So, in spite of the expense, the labour, the ambition, there was a contradiction in the modern paranoiac dream. (*Centre* 137)

The writer states that in broad daylight, the crocodiles become more than a tourist sight. Naipaul becomes more and more curious to know about the crocodiles: He hears different stories which increase his desire. He learns about a watchman who unknowingly walked on the spot where crocodiles had laid eggs and was seized by the crocodiles and dragged into water. Another story he hears is about a villager who had fallen off the iron rail into the lake and had been swallowed by crocodiles like the chicken. Naipaul wonders whether it was an accident or a forced sacrifice. Naipaul is further told that the man was a voluntary sacrifice, that he had been persuaded (perhaps by

some threat) to do what he had done in order to save his village from some evil. Out of curiosity Naipaul questions many people about the crocodiles and he get confused answers from everyone. Mr. Niangoran Bouch tells him

There are three symbols of kingship in Africa on the savannah, the panther. In the forest, the elephant. In water, the crocodile. The crocodile is the strongest creature in the water with one blow of that tail it can kill a man.  
(*Centre* 150)

Other Africans and Europeans inform Naipaul

that the crocodiles of Yomoussoukro by a particular movement of their heads, warned the President of danger to the state....the crocodiles, so feared, were meant to be mysterious, to be felt as a mystery, and only the President knew that they, and the ritual of their feeding, stood for.  
(*Centre* 152)

It is not only that Naipaul is ironically mocking at the lack of rationality amongst the Africans : on the contrary he is too impressed with the modernity and splendour of Yomoussoukro. He realises that Africa with its deep rooted belief in magic and world of spirits may not be able to handle the modern equipments once the foreigners who have made it will leave. Naipaul comments

they were like pieces of machinery, liable to decay. The new world existed in the mind of others / the skills could be learned, but faith in the new world was fragile. When the President went, and the foreigners went away, would

the faith survive? Or would Africans be claimed by another idea of reality  
(Centre 136)

Naipaul's interest in African magic for which the continent is very famous throughout the world, is roused after reading a daily news paper in Ivory Coast called Fraternite Matin. Through this paper Naipaul gets an idea that although Ivory Coast is on its march towards modernisation, magic has a great hold on Africa. In Fraternite Matin there is a sensational story of a school teacher whose house was from time to time blazed with mysterious fires. This mystery has been solved by a preacher

the celestial christians had discovered through some divine communication that the evil spirit was at the bottom of the business . in investigations of this kind ..... there were two levels that had to be considered . the mystical and the human . at the mystical level there was the evil spirit . at the human level, there was the person who had been possessed by the evil spirit and turned in to a fire raiser.....the celestial christians.....had found out who this person was.....the spirit had gone to the celestial christians and pleaded with them to be left in peace.....the celestial christians refused.....Did not want to hear any more . they at once ordered the evil spirit not only to leave the house, but also to get out of the Ivory Coast altogether and the spirit meekly went . (Centre 115)

Naipaul criticizes the modernization campaign which is being carried on without caring for the religious faith embedded deep in the psyche of Africans and hence is bound to be short-lived. The belief in the spirits is so deep rooted in the psyche of the Africans

that even educated Africans like Mr. Niangoran Bouch and others claim that while the day world belongs to the whites, the Africans reign supreme in the world of the night : we black Africans, we have all that they have—and Mr. Niangoran Bouch meant aeroplanes, cars, rockets, lasers satellites—we have all of that in the world of the night, the world of darkness. (*Centre* 148)

In the same vein Mr. Niangoran tells Naipaul that

Europeans could achieve only limited speeds, even with their rockets. African existed who could convert themselves into pure energy.....There are people in the villages today who can give you news every night of Paris and Russia and they are certainly not getting it on the radio....They had a great knowledge of astronomy, especially about the star Sirius, and they were said to be in touch with extra-terrestrial spirits. (*Centre* 148)

After hearing all these statements from the educated people about magic, Naipaul feels disturbed. He feels that the influence of magic has a baneful effect on the Africans though he also realizes that the belief in the supernatural is not just limited to the Africans : it is an integral part of human psyche. The Africans, however, are giving too much importance to the world of spirits and this is turning out to be a curse for them. He learns about some more brutal practices followed amongst Africans from Mr. Niangorain Bouch, who tells him that Africans are still ruled by magic. In the interior areas when



a chief or an important local man dies, the man's servants and his wives are buried with him because, as he said

African burial customs....Were like those of ancient Egypt. People believed that after death they continued the life they had lived on earth. So as man needed his wives and servants to go with him when he died some wives and servants understood this and accepted their fate but those who didn't want to be buried with their master for them there were sanctuary villages. (*Centre* 146)

Naipaul feels critical of the fact that one man's life is considered to be so important and the rest are treated as if they were the inanimate objects. He points that there are many inhuman practices in Africa, even heads of human beings are sold because of the superstition. If the tribal chief who has died and his servant has fled away, his absence is compensated by the bought head.

Heads were bought. That explained the regular disappearance of children, as reported in the necrology page of the newspaper . on that page there was a coded way of referring to certain kinds of death.....A child reported as having disappeared was presumed to have been sacrificed.....for these funeral or other sacrifices, a head could currently be bought for 10000 francs.....At certain ceremonies to welcome a chief or an important man had to have his feet washed in blood.....but to do a chief the highest honour, his feet should be washed in human blood, the blood of sacrificed person, a child, and the child could be eaten afterwards. (*Centre* 140)

Naipaul points out towards another superstitious belief in Africa that no one in Africa is thought to die naturally. A sorcerer is

always thought to be responsible for the death of a person and suspected person can be put to terrible trial to prove his innocence. He is also made to wear the dead person's clothes.

they were made to eat; the mutton of death '....generally among the betie people, truth was obtained from suspected persons by dropping the sap of gopo tree in their eyes; it was believed that the eyes of the innocent would not be damaged by the gopo (*Centre* 115)

Although Naipaul does not find fault with the African's belief in magic and world of spirits, he regrets the idea that on the pretext of magic, many inhuman acts are being committed which instead of pushing Africa forward are forcing it back. He quotes a story and he himself is in a fix how to treat that story -

and there had come my way a story which didn't know how to treat. A defective refrigerated container on the Abidjan docks part of the cargo from the Ivory coast to Nigeria—had begun to give offensive smell. The container had been opened : it was found to contain severed heads . sacrificial heads for export; technology at the service of old worship. (*Centre* 156)

Naipaul states that Africans consider themselves superior to Europeans because according to them their personality is not split. He presents the example of Mr. Bony, former education minister, who tells Naipaul that although European are inventive, creative people, they focus only on one aspect of life and develop only one part of man's nature. The Africans consider them to be children and regard

themselves older than the Europeans. Naipaul also gives the example of Arlette working at the Ivory Coast university. She arrives at the African way of looking at things when she throws her heart and soul in to the African mainstream. Her statement

to live in Africa and to understand its ways was to have all your old ideas unsettled. (*Centre* 158)

is a revelation. She is not a static person and does not have ego problem but that does not mean she does not possess an individual will. She is not like her friend Andree who has become a conscientious collaborator with Niangoran Bouch. From the core of her heart she does not have faith in African beliefs after the breakdown of her marriage. She feels trapped in the dark world of Africa and has no means to go back to her original home France. She laments living in Africa. Though like her Arlette too has suffered a marriage breakdown, she is comfortable in Africa.

Arlette tells Naipaul that Africans do not have split personality because they bear stoic indifference to the change of fortune. There is a belief amongst Africans

"yesterday we were all right. Today we are poor. That's the way it is. Tomorrow we may be all right again, or we may not. That's the way it is. (*Centre* 158)

Naipaul is further told by Arlette that Africans are not at all concerned with past or future because they believe in the principle of perpetual change.

Arlette is totally smitten by African life she has imbibed during her stay in Africa. The African experience is so rich and lively that it has taught her to respond to each situation with vigour and vitality. Arlette says that people who consider Africa to be a land of darkness are highly mistaken because according to her Africa has a civilization of her own which refuses to imitate western civilization. She tells Naipaul about a group of women who have come to Ivory Coast from New York. She says

We get so many people like them from the United States. Black people who come here to convert the Africans. They are like everybody else who comes to do that. They bring their own psychic sickness to Africa. They should instead come to be converted to Africa. They are mad.  
(*Centre* 160)

Arlette wants to convey to Naipaul that African people have an identity of their own which should not be spoilt by Western civilization. V.S. Naipaul speaks of the reality of black power in the *Overcrowded Barracoon*

The slave in Trinidad worked by day and lived at night. then the world of the white plantation fell away, and in its place, was a secure, secret world of fantasy of negro-kingdom, regiments bands. the people who were slaves

by day saw themselves then as kings queens.... At night the negroes played at being people, mimicking the right of the upper world. (*Barracoon* 227)

Arlette wants to drive home the point that Africa should not be branded as a land of superstition and magic. Africa has a soul of its own and it should not be tainted by any outside culture.

Naipaul on his part does not bear any prejudice against the Africans. He does not hold any pre-conceived notions about Africa. He wants to reach the truth after seeing it with his own eyes. His encounter with Niangoran-Bouch is aimed at countering the belief that there is nothing like African civilization or African philosophy. To a westerner Africa is a land steeped in magic witchcraft and ignorance but Naipaul has a different perception of African life.

Mr. Niangoran Bouch concept of "Drummologic" disapproves the notion that Africa is without civilization or philosophy : The drumming ceremony in Africa through its chants enacts the African history and tradition

The talking drum mimicked, and preserved the actual words of old chants : these chants were documents of the African past. As much as the asanti weights, with their elements of art and mathematics, true knowledge of the talking drum gave to Africa the old civilisation which Europeans and colonialists said didn't exist. (*Centre* 104)

V.S. Naipaul finds that drums are too much woven into the fabric of Africa and of African Life. He becomes interested in

learning more and more about drums and finds that Africans regard drum as holy object, a symbol of kingship, the tribe and the state. It is sacred all the more because to Africans nothing remains in the creation of god at the beginning, except the drum and a drum mimicked human speech and a trained drummer could rediscover in drumming, a particular message, a poem, an incantation, a piece of tribal history, victory and defeat.

Naipaul has an opportunity of having a look at photograph of the great royal drum of the Baoule tribe, the kwakla drum matted with the blood of enemy sacrifices. Some drum are so holy that they cannot be placed on the ground. Naipaul has an open mind and does not maintain a Westerner's high brow attitude who may consider the drum to be a property of rescent civilization.

Naipaul has a liberal vision and he takes great pains to define the African milieu in its elemental form. He maintains his ironic detachment to detect the shortcomings in the protagonists of African life. He finds that people like Junior Busby believe in the development of Ivory Coast but want that development should not taint the long-lasting African customs and traditions. Naipaul feels that this is impossible to imagine. Naipaul is also shocked to see that the ruler of Ivory Coast has tried to put the land in the mould of France. The journey of Naipaul ends on a note of despair. He finds that Africans live in a world of make-believe. They try to assert their own tradition

and culture and consider themselves superior to Europeans though they need the amenities provided by Europeans. Naipaul ironically narrates his meeting with Mr. Ebony who according to Naipaul is merely speaking borrowed ideas when he says

Africans live at peace with nature. Europeans want to conquer or dominate nature. (*Centre* 128)

Naipaul ironically says

That was familiar to me I had heard similar words from young Muslim fundamentalists in Malaysia; ecological, Western romance bouncing back like a corroborating radio signal from remote inactive worlds. (*Centre* 128)

Naipaul ironically comments referring to a book Introduction and Drummologic that

on the cover there was a photograph of Mr. Niangoran-Bouch seated at an open air drumming and singing ceremony of some sort. (*Centre* 148)

Naipaul cannot help adding, in brackets “with microphones”. Naipaul presents both the views of Africans and Europeans simultaneously. A middle aged European who has lived and worked in Africa for the whole of his life tells Naipaul, “All that you see here in Abidjan is make believe. If the Europeans were to go away it would all vanish”. While an African Mr. Niangoran-Bouch informs Naipaul about the ability of Africans to convert themselves into pure energy; There are people in the villages today. Mr. Niangoran-Bouch says

who can give you news every night of Paris and Russia and they are certainly not getting it on the radio. (*Centre* 148)

Naipaul quite sarcastically interposes

The electric light in the office went out. (*Centre* 148)

V.S. Naipaul wants to point out through his African travelogue that the third world countries should stop imitating the European nations and instead of condemning the West, they should strive for modernity and self dependence. Although Naipaul has sympathy for the under-developed countries and does not condemn them, he wants that these countries should try to overcome their own deficiencies. Naipaul feels an affinity with the Africans because they too are like him —exiles in their own land.



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## CHAPTER - VI

### CONCLUSION

The Travelogues of V.S. Naipaul occupy a distinguished place among his literary works. It would be unjustified on our part if we regard them as inferior to his novels. Naipaul has granted equal status to both forms and in connection with his non-fiction he states

All I would like to say is that I consider my non-fiction an integral part of my work. (James 1002)

Eminent critic R.D. Hamner has also stressed the fact that one can never draw a clear line of division between Naipaul's fiction and his non-fiction. He says

Naipaul is the kind of artist whose personal outlook and experience merge distinctly with everything he writes, whether fiction or non-fiction. The fiction emphasizes through selective dramatization the same reality that is treated with equal skill, but more directly, in his other books and articles. (Hamner 15)

The West Indian critic Gordon Rohlehr is of the similar view. He states

He often is writing the non-fiction to explain or counterpoint the fictional world. There are points where you get almost whole paragraphs virtually repeating themselves and clearly one cannot simply divorce one from the other. They are both issuing from a particular kind of sensibility. (Gordon 54)

Naipaul's literary works have a charm of their own. Literature and life interpenetrate, fiction and non-fiction counterpoint and complement each other and now it appears that he has diverted his literary efforts in the direction of non-fiction. The cause behind it appears to be the writer's conviction that in travelogues he has caught hold of a medium which provides him more liberty for expressing his ideas about the world. ✓

Naipaul's adopting the form of travelogues explains why "rootlessness" or being an "exile" is a major theme in his works. In an interview given in 1971 Naipaul talks of the writer as the communicator, the moulder, rather than the man of imagination. In answer to the question: Do you think that the future of the novel, as well as your own future as a novelist will be tending further away from the romantic, the imaginative function? Naipaul replied emphatically

Yes I do, you might go on endlessly writing creative novels, if you believed that the framework of an ordered society exists. But that no longer exists for most people: so that kind of imaginative work is of less and less use to them. (Evans 48)

The hidden intention lurking behind this statement can be understood by the fact that Naipaul has diverted his attention more to non-fiction and is coming up with more travelogues.

While analysing the travelogues of V.S. Naipaul, Paul Theroux has observed that there are two types of intrepid travellers. In the first

group are placed those who hail from a great and famous city or nation. These type of travellers have lots of confidence which has been instilled in them by the wealth of their home. They are emboldened by their history, their literature, they are calm and they travel only to compare. They have a sense of belonging to their homes where they can always return. In the second group are placed travellers like Naipaul who are homeless, having no sense of belonging to any part of the world. They are not calm and their homelessness acts as a spur and prompts them to wander from one society to the other. Naipaul's travelogues have emerged from his "rootlessness" and indirectly depict his suffering of being an exile. The most credible fact about them is that they have a sense of fidelity to complexities of life which is often not found in the travelogues of the travellers from metropolises who are self satisfied and calm. Naipaul's travelogues are impartial records of societies he has visited and they are untouched by pride or prejudice of any kind. If one wants to sincerely understand the travelogues of Naipaul, one must first peep into the personal life of Naipaul because his personal background itself has been one of the obsessive themes of his work. Naipaul has always turned his attention towards the lost abandoned places of this world. Countries like India, Pakistan, Mauritius, Zaire, Iran and the other Muslim nations have attracted him because he feels an affinity with them. He has revealed his attraction for them and has stated in

*Finding the Center* that he travels deliberately to places where people live restricted lives. The reason is, as Naipaul says

My curiosity is still dictated in part by my colonial Trinidad background. I go to places which however alien, connect in some way with what I already know. (*Centre* 87)

The people he meets and the views he records share something common with him : they are trying to find order in their world and looking for their center. The people he describes in the travelogues are also “lost” like him.

Naipaul's first travelogue *The Middle Passage* deals with the shattered lives of the West Indians. The theme of the travelogue can be easily made out from its title which refers to the sorrowful and difficult journey which brought millions of black slaves to these islands of the Carribean and it seems as though for these travellers the journey has still not ended. They have become exiles and are living in a state of constant temporariness.

Like the black slaves the Indians were also lured to these slave plantations in the hope of better prospects but they too have become displaced. Neither do they have a sense of belonging to the land of their ancestors nor are they able to accept the Carribean Islands as their home. So the result of this is that the people residing in these islands do not have a sense of belonging to any part of the world. They are homeless and crave for their identity.

In *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul has rejected and harshly criticised the West Indies but underlying this criticism and rejection is an anguished vision of people uprooted forever. A totally displaced man himself Naipaul seems to have a deep understanding of the effects of displacement and subjection on a people. Even Naipaul's choice of epigraphs for chapter two of *The Middle Passage* reflects his understanding about rootless people. He quotes

- a) Because several of their generations had lived in a transitional land, pitching their tents between the houses of their fathers and the real Egypt, they were now unanchored souls wavering in spirit and without a secure doctrine. They had forgotten much; They had half assimilated some new thoughts; and because they lacked real orientation, they did not trust their own feelings. They did not trust even the bitterness that they felt towards their bondage. Thomas Mann : The Tables of the law ( *Passage* 42)
- b) In place of distaste for the latin language came a passion to command it. In the same way, our national dress come into favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen and so the britons were gradually led on to the amenities that make vice agreeable — arcades baths and sumptuous banquets. They spoke of such novelties as 'Civilisation' when really they were only a feature of enslavement. Tacitus : Agricola ( *Passage* 42)

These epigraphs reveal his awareness that exile has always led to the loss of cultural and spiritual roots and foreign rule only gives rise to slavish mimicry. The epigraphs point out to the intertwined

fates of nations in modern times and whether Naipaul is writing about the West Indies, India, Pakistan or about Argentine – the feeling the constantly irks him is that something is wrong with these manufactured societies. They do not grow out of the soil, they do not have solid roots, they don't belong. The people have been just dumped on these territories which do not even have the capacity of supporting them economically, culturally or otherwise. The people living on these lands are permanent exiles having no sense of belonging to any part of the world.

After realising the fact that Trinidad had no scope for Naipaul and he would never be able to link himself with that land, Naipaul turned his gaze towards India. Only to realize that India of his dreams was far more different from India of reality. He always had a special concern for India and thought of it as partly his country but a confrontation with the reality of India showed how much he has been made by Trinidad and England. Naipaul was disillusioned to see the reality and found that he was not at all linked to the land of his forefathers. He laments in *An Area of Darkness*

The journey ought not to have been made it has broken my life in to two.. (*Area* 252)

Naipaul had a deep desire to forge a link with India : he had come to discover his roots but his Indian trip confirmed his position of an exile.

The most astonishing fact about his journeys to India is that there is a queer relationship of love and hate connected with these journeys. Though he considers that India can never be a home to him, still he keeps on coming to India again and again because at the innermost core of his heart, he believes he possesses some part of an Indian in him.

Though Naipaul is generally assumed to be a stern critic of India his criticism has evolved out of his love for India. What he saw pained him, enraged him. His reactions were violent – he was a man who cared and could not be indifferent. Naipaul had great expectations from India. For him Trinidad was insignificant and he had pinned all his hopes on India which got shattered on his arrival. However, one thing has to be borne in mind that Naipaul's expectations did not take into account the fact that India has been under the crippling yoke of British colonization for two hundred years.

Naipaul's travelogue *Among The Believers*, written on four Muslim countries reveals his sympathetic attitude towards the "exiled". During the course of his journey to the Muslim lands he meets many rootless people – who have lost their place in the world and are yearning for a centre. Naipaul meets an Indonesian poet Sitor Situmorang whose tragedy of life is that he is unable to begin his autobiography because he has lost touch with his tribal background.



He has realised that without knowing his background or having an understanding of where he has come from, was to do no more than to record a sequence of events. It is relevant for a writer to have a deep knowledge of his past, his roots, his origins. Naipaul shares the same destiny as Sitor because both of them have no knowledge of the past and both of them are rootless having no sense of belonging to any part of the world and the most ironical part of their story lies in the fact that even after having discovered their past, they realize that there could be no going back. Naipaul's search for roots in India and Trinidad has ended in disillusionment and in the same way Sitor too finds that he is not even very remotely connected with his tribal background. They cannot go back : both of them cannot pretend to be what they have ceased to be.

Naipaul also meets many other rootless and lost individuals during his course of journey to the Muslim lands. He finds Shafi a Malay man who regrets having lost touch with his simple village life. In Pakistan he meets an Ahmadi girl whose sect has been declared illegal and all the Ahmedis have been asked to leave Pakistan. She has spent all her life in Pakistan and all of a sudden she finds that she is an outsider having no right to live in Pakistan. Naipaul feels great sympathy for these people because they are as rootless as he.

As has been written earlier, there is a close link between Naipaul's fiction and non-fiction. So if we turn to his masterpiece

novel, *A House For Mr Biswas* we will find that it also portrays the tragedy of men of Indian origin living in Trinidad. These people do not have a sense of belonging to Trinidad, these people want to go back to India, the land of their forefathers but can not gather courage for that : they are forever living in two worlds one abandoned, other denied

They could not speak English and were not interested in the land where they lived it was a place where they had expected, they continually talked of going back to India but when the opportunity came, many refused afraid of the unknown, afraid to leave the familiar temporariness. (*House* 194)

The dilemma which these people face is that they can neither go back to the land of their forefathers nor can they accept Trinidad as their home. They are permanent exiles having not a tiny dot of earth to call their own. Naipaul sympathises with these people because he himself is as rootless as they are.

In one of his novels *A Turn <sup>u</sup> <sup>t</sup> In The South* Naipaul has revealed the pain of being an exile in the lines which pathetically point out to the plight of exiles. One of the major character<sup>s</sup>, Howard in this novel replies back to a certain question saying *I would go home to my Mama*.

Naipaul comments :

Jimmy was as struck by this as I was when Jimmy told me that Howard had something neither Jimmy nor I had a patch of the earth he thought of as home absolutely his. (*Turn* 3)

These lines also throw light on the fact that our childhood association can have such a strong hold over us. Naipaul had just spent eighteen years of his life in Trinidad and had nearly spent double that length of time in England and though England has provided him a home still he remains an exile. It is an astonishing fact that though Naipaul has been closely linked to three countries, Trinidad, England and India, he suffers from a deep sense of homelessness.

The tragedy of Naipaul's life is that his search for a home has been futile. He left Trinidad in the hope that might be able to find his roots in England but his dream of belonging to England betrayed him and made him disillusioned. He turned his gaze towards India, the land of his forefathers. He visited India in the hope of finding his roots : the trip only confirmed his position of an exile. The colonial enslavement in Trinidad has left him cut off from his Hindu heritage. At this stage of his life Naipaul felt that he was really and truly 'lost': and then he set out to discover himself and his world through his work. He states in *The Return of Eva Peron*

Most imaginative writers discover themselves, and their world, through their work. (*Return* 217)

Most of Naipaul's writings are directly or indirectly autobiographical. He has the heart beats of an exile. His writings by and large become the vehicle of portraying the craving of the exiles for

identity. It is an accepted fact that exile and home are two sides of the same coin, the full meaning of both can be understood only in the context of the other. Home symbolises a person's identity, national, cultural, spiritual. It is not just a place for living : it is security, and exile on the contrary is the loss of home, an uprooting and often it has a withering effect on the mind and spirit of a human being.

Love of home and anguish of exile have been among the basic human emotions of civilized world. (Joshi 3)

In our century however, "home" has become a symbol of all that has been lost of, ancient certainties, faith, and security. The dilemma of exile is in fact the dilemma of pain and suffering. From Galileo to Freud man has searched for an identity and worked hard at reaching a certitude, but uncertainty and frustration are the achievements of our civilization. The scientific achievements have helped man to gain victory over nature, but man's soul is lost in a vast dark sea where it is struggling and floating like an oarless boat unaware of its destination or predicament.

In our century, the exile, far from being a lonely and exotic figure, has become the type of modern man. It is to this worldwide crisis of rootlessness and homelessness that Naipaul's work is a sensitive response, taking into its stride both the reasons and consequences of the pathetic situation. Naipaul is unable to provide any soothing, comforting message to the modern man trapped in the

vast dark sea of suffering. Naipaul only offers the bleak understanding that in today's rapidly changing world the yearning and craving for permanence can never be more than an incurable fatal disease as "everyone is far from home in this modern age".

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